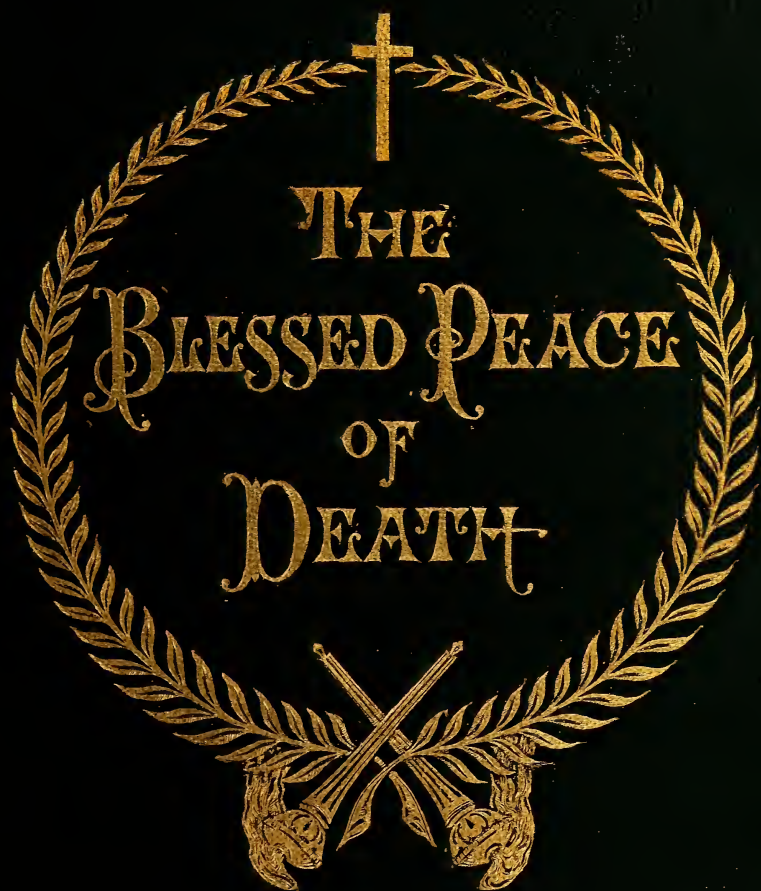






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THE BLESSED PEACE OF DEATH

A Little Book of Good Cheer

ADAPTED FROM THE GERMAN
OF
REV. AUGUSTINE WIBBELT

NEW YORK
JOSEPH F. WAGNER

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GREETING AND RESPONSE

*Oh blessed consummation! thus to feel
In death no touch of terror. Tenderly
As shadows from the evening hills, he came
In garb of God's dear messenger to thee!*

— FATHER TABB.

THE BLESSED PEACE OF DEATH

THE ISLAND IN LAKE CONSTANCE

ONE of the most enchanting spots on God's beautiful earth is the Island of Mainau, in Lake Constance.

From a distance its lofty trees seem to invite the traveller to cross the strip of blue water that separates it from the mainland. And when, on reaching the shore, he follows the path leading upward, through the mysterious twilight of the forest, he beholds, on attaining the summit, a view that resembles a vast and lovely garden, ablaze with flowering vegetation. Vines with softly curling tendrils sway in the breeze. Cypressess rear their solemn heads aloft. Graceful palms, as if aware that they are admired rarities in these parts, tower proudly toward the clouds.

The visitor falls willingly under the magic spell of such blissful surroundings. He asks himself in rapture if this is not perhaps the fabled Isle of the Blest, the abode of Eternal Peace. The leaves, moved by the gentle breeze, chant their ancient melody of praise and joy, and through the

branches of the trees glisten the sunlit waters, holding in tender embrace this fair spot of earth, as a silver frame enshrines an exquisite gem.

I had strolled along the lake, one lovely afternoon in September, in the shade of trees and across meadows, feasting eyes and mind and heart upon the sublime beauty of the landscape. Now I sat alone, upon a bench close to the water's edge.

At such a time, in such a place, what thoughts will come!

The glorious view had gradually disappeared with the sunlight. Above my head were the trees, hoary with age; at my feet the rippling waves, ever young, ever mysterious. It all became now gray, dull, monotonous. All became silent, save the faintly whispering trees and the rippling waves. Then, lo! away in the distance, veiled in the evening mist, a little boat had stealthily appeared. Briefly the sail gleamed brightly, then it vanished. It had come unnoticed; silently it withdrew.

The sail had caught my eye and my thought . . . the gathering darkness, the quiet waters, the distant boat. My eyes strove to follow it, but it had gone. Scarcely made aware of its existence, I saw it vanish into the unknown. So, too, would I vanish out of this existence one day, out upon the waters of Eternity, into the mysterious beyond. My spirit grasped that tiny symbol, and humbly it gave greeting to the mighty, yet gentle

Angel of Death, of whose work I was here so vividly reminded.

I had encountered his majestic presence before. Sometimes he had inspired me with consolation, sometimes with awe. I knew what it meant to shudder at the ominous rustling of his wings. But now my heart went out to this Angel; he seemed to be drawing nearer, ever nearer. I seemed to feel his eyes fixed upon me. Something akin to love and longing thrilled in my heart, and I resolved: "Yes, I will write of thee, my friend. I will write of the things which I have felt, which I have seen of the mysterious journey. I will write of Death, of gentle Death, who tenderly approaches the wounded pilgrim and points the way to a better Life."

Living, we pass on and on — toward Death, striving toward him, yet afraid of him. To you, then, poor, weary souls, wounded souls, crushed by Life and its burdens, scarce able to live and loath to die, to you I dedicate these thoughts. Find here if you can, and oh! I pray you may, a balsam for your wounds, a staff for your faltering steps, a wellspring of comfort. Life has given you but little, yet you fear to think of Death! True, he is awe-inspiring, and in his obscurity more terrible than Life with all its trials. Yet Death loses its terror if we valiantly make friends with him, if we see in him the death sanctified by Christ on the Cross.

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6 *THE BLESSED PEACE OF DEATH*

You, who glory in strength and happiness, who delight in Life and activity, do not disdain my pensive musing. Not mine the desire to undervalue God's great gift, Life, and the joy of living it well. Rather would I show you how Life may triumph over Death, teaching you to rejoice in Life, to take from it the courage to die.

.

The little boat that had so stirred my thoughts had long since vanished in the mist, lost upon the horizon. I rose and went my way; but though I was the only human being on the Island, I felt I was not alone. The Great Angel walked invisibly beside me, and his blessed peace was soothing to my soul.

THE ANGEL'S GREETING

WHEN a friend gives us greeting, we respond with a smile; when a stranger greets us, our answering salutation is courteous; we fail not to acknowledge a greeting, even though the one offering it may be displeasing.

Yet the Angel of Death greets us often, and we pay no heed. In his work there is never a pause; like the fabled Wandering Jew, he travels to and fro over the earth, resting neither night nor day. We will never encounter the Wandering Jew, but Death we encounter all

the time. No one can avoid him. He gives us greeting and we turn aside, although one day, despite our reluctance, we shall put our hand into his and start with him on the long, long journey. It is well for us, perhaps, that the Great Angel does not resent our averseness.

The days draw near when we must salute him, whether we will or not. Perhaps his wings rest now above our homes — one near and dear to us pays the debt of nature and is carried tenderly away in those sheltering folds. Perhaps the tolling bell peals forth while a sad cortege passes before our eyes, bearing the mortal shell of one who was a neighbour, a friend. Mayhap we gaze upon the countless mounds where lies the mouldering dust of many of earth's brightest, purest, and best, where we all will rest when summoned; yes, even you and I. Who, at such times, can fail to hear the soft rustle of those wings, to feel the solemnity of his quiet presence? And when the scythe swings mightily, in times of war, pestilence, or dread catastrophe, and the gentle rustle of those wings becomes a mighty blast, carrying all before it, then, indeed, are our hearts haunted with dread. Greetings such as these are like the terrific crashing of the thunderbolts of heaven, and the nations stand helpless and aghast.

The Angel keeps his message persistently before our eyes, but we will not read its portent for ourselves. We step upon the worm, the ant, it

dies. The leaf, withered and sere, flutters, dead, to the ground; the flash of lightning, the fading blossom, the stroke of the clock — they all are reminders that Death will finally claim us. We cannot pick up a newspaper without reading intelligence of Death in the very heart of the busy city, where Life pours out its strongest flood; we meet often the funeral coach, and pass the many business signs of those who make a profession of caring for the dead.

We will not listen, his step is so light, his wings hardly audible amid the noise and bustle of Life. We are so busy with other things! We have eyes and ears only for our own interests, and these interests are of the world. And then comes the hour when the hand of Death is laid upon our wrist. His touch is tender, his voice soft as the breeze that gently stirs the flowers. Tenderly he greets us — the greeting of good will. When he salutes us thus, we feel no alarm, no terror. Rather our hearts expand in a quiet yearning, pervaded with both joy and sorrow — and then we respond to his gentle greeting.

Let the soul contemplate now the truth that it will then completely realize. God sends not a savage tyrant to rend from us the payment of our debt, but one of His own gentle angels to be our guide through the valley of the shadows. Dark night may shroud him, gloom may encompass him, but gaze a little steadier and you will see the

sweetness of his eternal smile, shedding light upon the way — the way that leads to heaven.

For if we correspond to grace, our Life and Death are

“ . . . but a means unto an end; that end Beginning, mean, and end to all things — God.”

Grant, blessed Lord, that Death, when he comes to us, may find us ready. And if it be Thy will that Thy Angel come unexpected, we will contentedly accept Death, because it is Thy holy will!

Death is coming and I hear him,
Soft and stealthy cometh he;
But I do not believe I fear him,
God is now so close to me.

— FATHER RYAN.

THE GENTLEST OF GREETINGS

WE are pilgrims, and our pilgrimage leads us through the valleys. The roads along which we toil are rough and dusty. We are burned by the heat of the sun, borne down, subdued, by Life's monotony. Our vision is hemmed in. Occasionally, perhaps, a wider vista opens before our eyes, a fresher air fills our lungs, and we walk more cheerfully. But these moments are rare. Rarer still are the hours when

we reach, as it were, a mountain-top on our toilsome way, and looking backward survey the ground through which we travelled. We gain a new enchanting idea of the beauty of the world, of the richness and fulness of life. Our souls, entranced and happy, soar aloft, as on the pinions of the eagle, and attain sublime heights. We are happy with that happiness which the great Creator alone can bestow.

Such an hour comes upon us when we least expect it. We cannot command it when we will. Such an hour is given us by God alone. It falls like the dew from heaven; we cannot define our exultation, our joy, our sudden and new realization of the meaning of all past anguish and tribulations. No words are adequate to describe our sensations. Silently we contemplate, silently we rejoice.

Yet it is at this very moment, when Life seems pouring into our hearts all that it has to offer, that the Strong Angel approaches to offer us his gentle greeting. Let our ears but be attuned to its music and it will not mar our joy.

For the most brilliant landscape is not without shadow; and not without a touch of melancholy our moments of intensest happiness.

We ask ourselves why it has come, whence it has come. In the midst of the song of triumph another note sounds — the minor key, the sweet sadness of which fills our eyes with tears, though we are overwhelmed with joy. Excessive happi-

ness makes us weep, we know not why. Has not this been your experience too? Have we not wept from sheer excess of happiness, on contemplating some glorious scene, on hearing some wonderful music that thrilled our very heart? Have we not trembled when the realization of some fond hope filled us with delight?

We wept, we trembled, because our souls, unconsciously, imperceptibly, realized that Death impresses on all worldly beauty, all earthliness, the marks of transitoriness and insufficiency. All fair things must fade, and the fairest will fade the quickest. The anticipation of a sad change clouds our brightest hours.

And why? St. Augustine gives us the real reason, the only reason: "Thou madest us for Thyself, O God, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee." So, in the midst of Life, the Strong Angel reminds us of that which is to come — gently, tenderly, but nevertheless irresistibly.

But, it may be argued, how can we be expected to think that it is Death who is greeting us in our enjoyment of happiness and beauty? Ah, only the true philosopher can grasp this fact in the midst of his joy; only he who stands on the highest plane has this great gift in his possession.

For there is no gloominess in that gentlest of greetings. It is full of sweet promise; it fills our hearts with longing. When we once attain those heights and open our hearts to their full meaning, we know that earth can never satisfy the spiritual

part of us — our immortal souls. A light from heaven seems to penetrate our beings and fill us with strange yearning. Death, the Great Messenger, has pointed out what lies beyond Life, beyond Humanity, and never does his smile seem brighter in the darkness than when he gives us his gentle greeting. Ah, yes: "Thou madest us for Thyself, O God, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee!"

Thus that which tells of Death tells now of Life, since Death is no longer the end, but the beginning. How foolish the man who closes his ears and will not listen, who denies his soul the beauty of comprehension, and turns it back to earth again — to earthly Life, with all its troubles and anxieties! What of these little troubles, which shall vanish like water poured out upon the ground? What of our small anxieties, which shall be dissipated like clouds before the sun? Nay, let us return this gentlest greeting. It sounds upon the ears like the distant echo of a beautiful bell, ringing to summon the wanderer home.

Death has its terrors and Life its anxieties. Help us, O Saviour Crucified, to endure the anxieties of Life, the terrors of Death. Let us live our lives as Thou hast bidden us to live them, so that when our time arrives, we may with serene conscience greet Thy gentle Messenger.

OCTOBER DAYS

WHAT dies more gloriously than a day in golden October, its delicate blue sky flecked with amber, its colors faintly tingeing the objects all about us? The poorest brier is transformed into gold, the tops of hedgerows and beeches are blood-red, as though the ruddy glow of sunrise or sunset had been torn to shreds and scattered over the landscape. The day, in its short span, gathers up all the beauty and sweetness of the year. Not even in "marvellous May," nor in the height of midsummer, is the world so beautiful. It is a fairy tale of wealth galore, of living jewels, of golden fire flashing upward. In the far distance hangs a veil of blue mist; even at noon the dew-drops glisten like pearls beneath the hedges . . . and above all is the sun, calm, kindly, lavish, emblazoning the wondrous beauty that is doomed to Death.

For the splendour of October is dying, even at its height, and through all nature, robed in garments of riotous colouring, singing with lusty throat the song of fulness and plenty, runs the soft undercurrent of sorrow. October is dying — and summer is dying too.

Ah, but what a death! Let us learn from this glorious passing what the end should be of those who die in peace with God. There is no struggle, no fear, no agony. The flaming leaves are detached softly from the parent stem; they flutter

like butterflies through the air to the waiting earth, whose golden carpet grows apace. No sound disturbs the evening calm. All nature sinks to rest with smiling lips and radiant brow. Has not her task been faithfully accomplished? Has she not laboured through the heat of the day and borne fruit? In rain and sunshine, storm and calm, she has put forth her leaves, her flowers; has bowed beneath the burden of her productiveness — all, all for us! Her gifts have been lavishly bestowed, her work is done.

She has earned her rest.

The harvests are gathered. Nature's hands are folded idly in her lap, and while her head is decked with fragrant garlands, they are donned to bid farewell.

The sun sets. The faint blue veil of mist in the distance grows darker and denser; white vapours hide the meadows; the colours fade. Slowly the radiant smile gives way to a deep and solemn stillness. Would that we might have a death like this! Would that we could pass away in the beauty of good achievement, in the calm of complete confidence in our blessed Lord, in willing surrender to our Maker . . . after an active, well-spent, earnest-minded life.

Will such an end be ours?

Why should it not be? Does not the thought bring joy to your heart and peace? Yet it is Death that you have been contemplating. Is not Death beautiful? And your last hours shall be

like this; you, too, shall extend your hand to meet that welcoming grasp which is to lead you on and on, into the Presence where Life will reign for ever and for aye.

How short the years that have fled, though they number threescore. Teach us, O Lord, the true meaning of Life. Let us think once at least during the day of Thy gentle Messenger. That once will bring us nearer heaven, nearer Thee!

AN ITALIAN SAYING

*V*EDERE *Napoli e poi morire.* "See Naples and die."

One who does not understand this saying — a favorite one in Italy — might be apt to regard it as poetic exaggeration or pardonable boastfulness. While the Italian proudly regards his as the fairest of countries, he exults in the beauty of Naples. To see Naples, he declares, is to see the greatest beauty the world has to display! Let Death come, then, since Life has nothing better to show.

I wonder if there are many who see this meaning in the well-known expression. There is often a deep meaning in such popular sayings. They sound simple, yet their meaning conveys a great truth. So does this one about Naples. It conveys, if the reader will understand it, a profound

human experience which may escape the intellect. The glory of the handiwork of God, revealed here to mortal eyes, may fill us with such yearning for heaven that we long to take up our abode for ever in the kingdom of the Great Creator.

When any great, overpowering happiness comes to us we exclaim, often with our lips and always in our heart: "I should be satisfied to die now!" That is not a mere phrase. It is an expression, often unconscious, of real sentiment. We are avowing an actual truth.

But why should we wish to die? Do we desire to put an end to our extreme happiness? On the contrary, we desire never to lose it, we wish to perpetuate it. Fain would our souls bask for ever in this joy. We *know* that Death is but the gate, the passage, leading to Life Eternal.

So our hearts, thinking of Death in the midst of joy, do not mean Death, but Life. "If I could die now!" — to escape loss, decay. "If I could die now!" — to fly from this imperfect Life to the true Life. "If I could die now!" — for ever to possess the happiness that here too soon will escape our grasp.

And this sentiment underlies — for those who care to read this meaning — the popular saying of the Neapolitan — nay, more than this. For what confidence in God, what assurance of His care of us, are contained in these words that well up from the depths of the soul, from experiences which the humble as well as the great may feel.

Life, full to overflowing with happiness, greets the Messenger of Peace, not as a destroyer, but as a deliverer. Surely this is a testimonial to the inborn belief in immortality.

And is all this really contained in such a simple phrase? What does it matter? Beneath the saying is its meaning; we may discover it if we so choose. The important thing is that within ourselves, within our hearts, we have that knowledge which may cast, if we let it do so, a bright light upon the darkness of Death. He who can feel this will agree with me. He who cannot feel it has not yet learned the strength that dwells in the Life that serenely views Death.

Strange that we could forget heaven when contemplating the beauty of this world! How strange that we do not realize that all this beauty is but heaven's reflection. Vouchsafe, O Lord, that when the world delights us it will bring us nearer heaven; that in the beauty of the world we shall see Thy beauty faintly mirrored.

GOD'S ACRE

IN one of his ballads a certain poet describes a remarkable vision. He beheld the earth, bare and dead, and kind angels came down from heaven to sprinkle the earth with blessed water, thus to revive it. But the drops rolled off the

barren surface and found no resting-place, for there was no spot on the whole earth unstained by sin. The whole earth is just one large place of Death.

This is but a poet's vision, but it brings home to us the thought that there is not a spot on this earth which Death has not visited, where some creature has not died.

There are graves everywhere. Not alone where the crosses mark them; there the dead lie closely together, even one above another if the place has been long in use. But there are graves in the open country, enclosed by no rail, marked by no cross or monument. There are battlefields where so many lie, cut off in the flower of their youth, with the green grass growing over them and the birds singing over them; and there are many forgotten battlefields, of ages dead and gone. Since the earliest centuries nations have fought against nations, peoples have perished whose names have perished with them. Subjects and princes, vassals and kings — they all lie low. And where? Perhaps beneath the very ground on which your dwelling stands; beneath the streets you walk, the fields you plough, the parks and pleasure grounds wherein you hold high festival — over the graves of people long forgotten. The dust of those who are gone is carried on every wind, and if a cross were to stand on every spot where a human body rests, the world would be one large graveyard. There are graves in the sands

of the desert; graves at the bottom of the sea; graves in the mountain gorges; graves on the lonely heights; graves where the tide of Life flows fastest.

Should this thought turn us from Life disgusted with a distaste for the world in which we live? Should our footsteps falter, our activities cease, because, perchance, the dead have preëmpted the ground on which we tread, the soil we till? No; for we see the Life about us, new Life, strong and sweet, springing up from the ground wherein they lie . . . forgotten.

Give unto Life that which it has the right to demand, but let it not attempt to hold us captive. Remember that Death will claim his due. Since we dwell in his domain, do not pass him by without a greeting, for he is a king, wearing a crown of laurel and of rue. The dead are forgotten and the living are heedless, but Death still reigns, and it will be long ere he lays aside his sceptre. There is only One to whom he will surrender it — that mighty One who for our sakes came down upon this earth and robbed Death of all his terrors, and the grave of its victory.

When your glance meets with the sight of a grave, turn not away; shrink not from the thought that we live, perhaps, on a cemetery. Some day this world will cease to be the place of the dead; it will become a garden of the living.

Let us instead lift up our eyes to the azure sky, comforted and strong in our belief in Him who

said: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believes in Me, though he be dead, shall live eternally."

Take Thou our hearts into Thy keeping, O Saviour Crucified, and make us unafraid! Let neither the heights nor the depths confound us, since we belong to Thee! And the Strong Angel will find us valiant hearted.

WHERE WILL YOUR CROSS STAND?

IN certain Catholic countries it is the custom to erect a cross upon the spot where a person has met with a sudden and violent death. Traveling through these countries one will meet with such crosses in many places — on mountain slopes, along roads, in the forests. And every cross is meant to be a solemn reminder for those who pass that way.

Death, whether swift or slow, is a serious matter. His presence consecrates palace or hovel, and as crosses stand where Life was suddenly and rudely wrenched from a living body, so might crosses mark every spot where any one goes out into Eternity — whether his death be violent or peaceful. The only objection might be that then, through all the length and breadth of God's earth, not a single place would be without a cross or crosses.

Somewhere upon this earth our own crosses are waiting. God alone now knows where. He might, if He chose, reveal our cross for us, that we and others might contemplate it. Whither may we go to look for it? Let us seek it together, for though we will not discover it, the search is not in vain.

We will try to find this cross first in our own homes, in our own rooms; for if one has a permanent abode, he is justified in supposing that he will die there after an illness long or short.

Who knows under what circumstances? In solitude, forsaken, or surrounded by friends? Will the sunshine linger over me, or will the darkness of night enfold me? Shall I be expecting the Great Messenger and be well prepared to go out with him into the unknown country, or will he come unheralded and suddenly place his fingers upon my eyelids, sealing them for eternity?

Our thoughts take us further still. What if a white cross, bearing our name and date of death, really stood at the head of our beds — would we be able to sleep peacefully night after night? Or perhaps this cross stands elsewhere, in the shaded nook of our garden, where we love to retire to read a favourite book, or to contemplate the Life around us, to enjoy past memories, present joys, anticipating the future — confident, above all, of the mercy of our Creator and our Saviour. What if the white cross suddenly gleamed through the foliage, announcing that now the Strong Angel

was approaching, that we must rise to give him greeting!

Again, we may pay a friendly visit to a neighbour. The church bell is ringing the Angelus. A long day of tedious work has left us tired, but feeling the satisfaction that all must feel who realize what a blessing work is to mortal kind. An hour of pleasant chat will refresh us. And behold the cross appears over our chair, the gleaming, white cross . . . and Life's work is done for ever!

Is there any spot which may be exempt? In the heart of the busy city, where the surge of Life is most rapid, on the twin lines of shining steel that stretch, gleaming in the sun like serpents, beside a calm lake, on a mountain height, or in the lonely moor, close to your home or in far-distant land, everywhere this cross is likely to seek root. We only know that Death is the one inevitable thing that Life holds in store for us. Neither time nor place is within our keeping. They are God's. But one thing is there at our discretion. When the Great Messenger comes he must find us ready, with our lamps trimmed and filled and our lights burning brightly. Then in the shadow of his wings we shall depart in peace, to know thereafter neither

“Morn of toil nor night of waking.”

There is the cross of Life as well as the cross of Death; there are many among us who find Life

harder than ever Death can be. Help us to safely bridge this chasm, O Lord, Thy hand supporting us, Thy loving Heart our guerdon!

WHEN?

SOME day in Spring,
When earth is fair and glad,
And sweet birds sing,
And fewest hearts are sad —
Shall I die then?
Ah! me, no matter when;
I know it will be sweet
To leave the homes of men
And rest beneath the sod,
To kneel and kiss Thy feet
In Thy home, O my God!

Some Summer morn
Of splendours and of songs,
When roses hide the thorn
And smile — the spirit's wrongs —
Shall I die then?
Ah! me, no matter when;
I know I will rejoice
To leave the haunts of men
And lie beneath the sod,
To hear Thy tender voice
In Thy home, O my God!

Some Autumn eve,
When chill clouds drape the sky,
When bright things grieve
Because all fair things die —
Shall I die then?
Ah! me, no matter when;
I know I shall be glad,
Away from the homes of men,
Adown beneath the sod
My heart will not be sad
In Thy home, O my God!

Some Wintry day,
When all skies wear a gloom,
And beauteous May
Sleeps in December's tomb,
Shall I die then?
Ah! me, no matter when;
My soul shall throb with joy
To leave the haunts of men
And sleep beneath the sod.
Ah! there is no alloy
In Thy joys, O my God!

Haste, death! be fleet!
I know it will be sweet
To rest beneath the sod,
To kneel and kiss Thy feet,
In heaven, O my God!

— FATHER RYAN.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

WHEN two friends meet, one often greets the other with the question: "Where are you going?" And I, your friend, would like to put the same question to you: "Where are you going?"

I know the answer. I, too, am travelling in the same direction, though neither you nor I know who will be the first to reach the goal. We are on the inevitable journey that leads to . . . Death. While everything else in Life is uncertain, of Death we are sure. Life ends in Death, and every hour brings it nearer.

What a strange journey it is! We may twist and turn, this way or that, backward or forward, but we cannot fail to come to the same end. No road leads away from it. There are no cross-roads by which it may be avoided. Every path, no matter how straight or crooked, points unerringly toward it. We may dislike to advance farther — still we go on. Time grants no respite. Sooner shall the earth cease to move around the sun, or the moon refuse to shed its light from the midnight sky, than that our steps may halt on the way.

No one can tell how long the journey; no one can prophesy what ending. In God's merciful providence these things are hidden, though they be close at hand. We see only what is immediately before our eyes — and this is well, for

every day has its duties; they must be fulfilled or they will cry out against us.

And yet . . . these duties might be more cheerfully fulfilled if we but took time to consider the end. Each of us, when he thinks of Death, fondly imagines it to be far distant. Yet while the old must die, the young are not safe, and Life itself proves this, though in his folly the strong man still exults in saying: "Take thy rest, eat, drink, be of good cheer!" and he refuses to hear the reply: "Thou fool! This night shall thy soul be required of thee!"

Most of us refuse to learn some things which it would be expedient for us to know. We must look forward and upward — forward into reality, upward to the blessed Eternity promised to him who proves faithful. And so, not losing sight of these things nor of our blessed, loving Lord, let us lay our hand vigorously to the lifework He has set for us to do. We shall remember Death as the Angel of Peace who, at our very coming into the world, was the first to ask the question: "Where are you going?" and himself answered it by inspiring us to soar aloft, to reach those heights which now we seem scarce ready to attain.

One blessing we crave of Thee, O Lord, one gift from Thy providence. We would meet him . . . surprised, perhaps, but oh, how glad that our house is ordered, that our hearts are clean and pure!

MEMENTO MORI

REMEMBER, oh man, that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." At the beginning of Lent the Church invites her children to the altar rail, that they may receive upon their foreheads the blessed ashes and be reminded of the solemn words addressed by the Creator to Adam after the Fall.

Dust and ashes, tokens of Death. Surely no simpler or more impressive token than this *Memento Mori* could ever be devised. The Church has the good of her children at heart and lavishly draws upon her rich treasury to help them attain perfection. All her symbolism and ceremony are aids to this one great purpose — their salvation. But her reminding of Death is distasteful to the self-indulgent world in which we live, the world which clings to Life, as if this Life were all, and which fears nothing so much in uncertain Life as its certain ending. Every *Memento Mori* is rejected as foolish and unwholesome, a foe of energy, of progress, a fallacy originating in mediæval monasticism.

Yet has not our blessed Lord Himself uttered many an emphatic *Memento Mori*? Nietzsche, unhappy man, blasphemously dared to criticize Him who knew but suffering and sorrow, dared to assert that had Jesus lived longer, He would have learned to love the pleasures of Life.

Nietzsche, who worshipped force and life, who

abhorred suffering and death, was wretched and unhealthy in mind and body, and his teachings partake of this unhealthy character. Compare with them our dear Lord's precepts, which contain the fountain of Life; when He speaks of suffering and Death, He tells us how they can be made to bring us peace and joy, like true sweetness from a bitter root.

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Not every one can climb the mountain heights. The long and arduous ascent will exhaust those who are not strong; the air does not suit weak lungs; and the nervous turn sick and dizzy when looking down the precipice.

But to those strong of soul, the spiritual man or woman, the heights, wherefrom one may contemplate Death, mean new energy, strength, joy, exhilaration. Only those deficient in spiritual vigour cannot endure the thought of Death. Not that it is necessary to place a skull in one's bedroom, as some great penitents did. Nor is there need to have a coffin about, or day by day to dig at one's grave. Extraordinary souls may do these things with spiritual profit, but we are not extraordinary souls.

Astronomers tell us that the space through which the earth moves is filled with clouds of cosmic dust, being the shattered atoms of prehistoric worlds. These atoms become visible to us in the form of shooting stars. On certain nights

of the year there occur showers of meteors visible to the naked eye, but the astronomers, incessantly scanning the heavens, see innumerable meteors, visible only through the powerful telescope, in every portion of the sky. Night and day, therefore, a rain of stones and ore is steadily falling upon the earth, and it would be smashed to pieces were it not for the atmosphere that surrounds it. The great velocity of the meteorites causes them, on coming into contact with this atmosphere, not merely to become red-hot, but to be reduced into gas, so that only the heaviest of them approach near enough to become visible to us.

The impression produced upon our minds by reminders of Death may be likened to the effect produced upon the earth by such meteors. Life is filled with such reminders. Every day supplies fresh ones, and our minds would be utterly crushed by them if we had no atmosphere to shield us. This atmosphere is our everyday existence, with its everyday demands upon us — demands so imperative and urgent as to soften all impressions that are not so insistent. Now and then, however, as on Ash Wednesday, or when Death enters our homes, when one we sincerely love is carried away, a *Memento Mori* flashes through the worldly atmosphere surrounding us and occupies our thoughts until Life once more claims our whole attention.

Life *must* be lived. And as we live it such shall

be our reward. Since Christ, our Lord, in whom God's goodness to us appeared visibly, bids us think of Death, be very sure that Life and Light are following close behind. Why should we refuse to look upon the glory that awaits us? We make the pilgrimage but once. Let us make it well, and after it there comes true Life, celestial, eternal.

Death came unheralded:—but it was well;
 For so thy Saviour bore
 Kind witness, thou wast meet at once to dwell
 On His eternal shore;
 All warning spared,
 For none He gives where hearts are for prompt
 Change prepared.

— CARDINAL NEWMAN.

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True it is that one cannot always think of Death, and this is Thy divine will, O Lord! But as one who enters an antechamber, there to prepare one's self for the banquet, so with Life, which is the antechamber to heaven.

THE TWO BROTHERS

THE ancient Greeks revelled in the beauties of the world. They were children of the sun. The skies above them were bluer and clearer and more brilliant than any other skies of the

earth. At their feet rolled the crystal seas, and their numerous ships rode the waves proudly, gallantly. Olives grew abundantly on the white hill of Colonus; Hymettus flowed with honey; luscious grapes abounded; and under the flowering laurels the spring of Castalia poured forth, unceasingly, an enchanting song.

Art and poetry might thrive in other lands, but Greece was their home, their birthplace. They were her offspring. She was the country of Apollo, whose golden lyre filled Parnassus with melody. Statues of immortal beauty were fashioned from the marble of Pentelicus. The Greeks looked upon Life as a holiday, each day a feast. Crowned with garlands of flowers, they rejoiced in beauty and sang and danced the hours away, inebriated with the very gladness of being alive. Their language was the language of the gods, their every action was attuned to rhythm. Nevertheless, when their country needed strong arms, they were stern warriors, eager to prove their patriotism by deeds of valour.

But even in sunny, happy Greece men had to die. Never was Death more unwelcome.

They could not avoid him, they could not spurn him. They decked him, therefore, in gorgeous attire and greeted him with soft strains of music. Death has a gentle brother, Sleep. So the Greeks bestowed upon Death, whom they feared, the form and attributes of Sleep, whom they loved. To them Sleep and Death were as two youths,

oppressed with a sweet sadness, relaxing the limbs in rest, indistinguishable from each other but that one held in his hand a poppy and the other an inverted torch, the symbol of extinguished Life.

The inverted torch was sufficient. They refused to see in Death anything else. A deeper sleep — such was the sterner brother. Yet they were conscious of something more solemn, more awe-inspiring than they would acknowledge, as is evident in the vein of sadness that runs through their light-hearted songs.

Homer, whose sightless eyes beheld his times so clearly, and whose Muse sang delightedly of the glory of the warrior's doom — even Homer shrank from Death. His dead hero, Achilles, returning from Hades, the land of the departed, says to his former brother-in-arms: "Speak not to me, oh illustrious Odysseus, in praise of Death. Rather would I till the ground, working for a master as a labourer, poor in worldly goods and mean in living, than I would rule over all the land of the dead."

Of the songs by the Lesbian poetess, Erinna, only few lines have come down to us. Like a sigh heavy with tears, sounding softly through the ages, they say: "Many are the roads to Hades, and one or the other thou needs must tread. . . . Doubt it not."

Anacreon, who sang of wine and mirth, exclaimed: "I sigh again and again: How terrible, how terrible is Death! Yes, fearful is Hades,

and awful the path that leads thereto. He who once has trodden that path returns nevermore!"

Thus did Death, the brother of gentle Sleep, take off his mask and show his real countenance to the Greeks, who thought of naught so much as hiding him from view. They had fashioned for him a fair exterior . . . but as to what was underneath they were not deceived. Though regarding Death as the brother of Sleep, they clung passionately to Life. They had not our promise, they had not our faith. Yet Death is indeed but a sleep, which God gives to His beloved, His redeemed ones; and the Great Messenger, His blessed Angel, lulls our fears in gentle slumber by the rustling of his wings. The Death of the Greeks was Death indeed; our Death is sleep indeed — the sleep of a night that shall behold a new and glorious day dawn.

Let us not forget that all we think and say and do — our thoughts, our words, our actions — are but stones in the building of Life. We are the builders, our souls the edifice.

MAKE THE MOST OF TO-DAY!

IN the golden age of Roman literature under Caesar Augustus, the famous poet Horace — Quintus Horatius Flaccus, to give him his full name — immortalized in verse the falling of a

rotten tree. He told a true tale, for the tree in falling had struck him on the head, and he thought the event worthy of his talents. His lyrics and satires have come down to us, though they contain naught heroic or great, for he was neither a hero nor a great man. When he sings of Roman virtue, his song does not ring true. His poems on wine and love are his best; being a man of his times, he understood these things. Of good sense, refined tastes, somewhat too cold and calculating for a poet, he preferred, because of ill-health, his little estate in the country to the noisy gayety of the city. He led a pleasant enough life, and being a zealous imitator of Greek life and an ardent admirer of Greek beauty, he struck his lyre with a golden plectron, and it gave forth songs as gay as ever were sung by Anacreon and Sappho.

On sunny summer days Quintus Flaccus, reclining under the shade of an oak-tree on his place in the Sabine Hills, and leisurely sipping excellent wine, would lightly pen witty verses and often spiteful ones. But now and then, like a troublesome insect, there vexed him the unwelcome thought . . . that all must end. Wine . . . poetry . . . sunshine . . . even Life! Yes, all must end!

Then would he shake his bothered head (which sometimes ached, since the blow received had been a severe one), and casting off such solemn thoughts, lift up his voice and gayly preach

the doctrine of the times: "*Carpe diem* — make the most of to-day! Trust not till the morrow! Crown your head with roses, for they fade so soon! Drink deep of the excellent wine, for Death has naught to offer you but dregs. Enjoy Life, for it ends so soon . . . so soon!"

Again the shrewd pessimism, the same proud folly! They have not died out with the pagan Horace, as you and I know. These are the highest ideals his pagan wisdom could attain . . . and the thought of Death taught him his lesson.

Holy Scripture fitly describes this as the "unprofitable philosophy of fools." "Come, therefore," cries the voice of recklessness, "let us enjoy the good things that are present, and let us speedily use the creatures as in youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments: and let not the flowers of the time pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with roses before they be withered: let no meadow escape our riot" (Wisd. ii, 6-8). But, adds the voice of warning: "These things they thought . . . and were deceived" (*ibid.*, 21).

Carpe diem — make the most of to-day! Trust not the morrow! What fear lies behind these words — what fear of the hour that will bring the Great Messenger! This philosophy of ancient Rome or Greece, down through the ages it has come, through the centuries, to this our own day. No times too prosperous, no times too evil to dim this call to fools. We read how, in

Italy, when the plague was devastating city and country, while good men and women vied with each other in deeds of mercy, when monk and nun, priest and layman were stricken at the bedside of those to whom they ministered . . . we read, I repeat, that a party of frivolous men and women of high rank fled from the city to a country villa and there gave themselves to riotous dissipation, oblivious of disease and death. *Carpe diem*, they cried! Make the most of to-day!

How wonderful, how inscrutable are the ways of God — that the same frivolous times which gave us lascivious poets gave us also saints like St. Charles Borromeo. Make the most of to-day! Who made the most of it? The corrupt writers or the high-souled saint? Who of us would not rather be stricken in doing the works of mercy than have our senses lulled to sleep in false security?

Carpe diem! Make the most of to-day. To-day is ours. To-morrow may be God's. Let it not be said of us that, having wisdom brought before our vision, we closed our eyes. Let us show that *we* know how to make the most of to-day.

We are sure of nothing. Nothing is ours save one thing . . . the grave. Rise now to the heights, look now beyond, nor wait until age has dimmed the vision and we can no longer observe its brightness.

THE SCYTHE OF THE REAPER

THE Middle Ages have been denounced, by some who write of them, as a period of darkness and ignorance, by others they are praised as one of brightness and joy.

Men in the Middle Ages were in all things vigorous. Vigorous were their faults and blunders, more vigorous their faith and charity, most vigorous of all their work and endurance. Not theirs the sugared philosophy of the Greeks. They did not pretend to regard Death as Sleep's twin-brother, they did not clothe his chill exterior with the warmth and glow of living flowers. Going, indeed, to the other extreme, they called him the Reaper, scythe in hand, and pictured him as a skeleton with an ugly grin, cruel, malicious, merciless, mockingly inviting the quailing mortal to dance with him.

That was the conception of Death in the Middle Ages.

They disguised nothing, they felt no need of palliation. But then they were vigorous. Their nerves were like steel, their minds full of ardent faith, they had no doubts — hence they could endure this grim visage of Death . . . Death stripped of all adornment. Unshrinkingly they gazed upon Death and dissolution . . . for above them dwelt the Cross, radiant with victory. The contemplation of Death only reminded them of

the need of serious penance; it was full of consolation because they were not afraid.

And they were earnest. They did not fritter away their time, they never lost sight of Eternity. Like children they made light of much that we find sorrowful, but on the other hand they took seriously to heart much that people nowadays dismiss with careless jest. Life and Death were grave matters — portentous matters, if you will; and because they thought often of the seriousness of their last end, they were on more familiar terms with the terrors of Death than we care to be, or actually need to be.

The men of the Middle Ages were filled with Life. Though so conscious of grim Death they erected their structures as if for Eternity. They undertook enterprises so vast that no single generation could accomplish them. They introduced art into the home and made of the smallest utensil a thing of beauty. Their whole existence was full of colour, as a meadow in springtime. They donned gorgeous attire and costly jewels; they held lavish banquets; gave much time to merry-making, and when, perchance, a wayfaring fiddler struck up a tune on the village green, they deserted their buckets at the well, their ploughs in the field, and hastened to join in the dance.

Life in those days was a thing of joy, of honest pleasure and delight. So that, even though Death was in their minds in the shape of a grinning skeleton, they found time and courage to live.

Let us, too, find pleasure in living well; no need for us to regard the Great Messenger as they did. We have learned of his gentleness. We will await his kindly smile, the clasp of his tender hand; but while waiting let us realize that the joy of being alive is the right of every man, and the heritage we should leave to our fellows.

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Let us compare, if we will, the 'genial but godless brain which emits sparks of living knowledge, stirring us to admiration, with the poor and humble soul without philosophy, without talent, but with a pure, devoted heart. When the blessed Messenger approaches, which of these two souls will be pleasing to him?

DEATH AND THE POET

GOETHE was a great artist, a great poet . . . but, alas, a poor Christian! Highly gifted, favoured by fortune, he lived and laboured for many years, his work the joy and delight of an admiring world. Men are eager to show esteem for those who can accomplish the one thing so hard to do; namely, to draw them out of themselves and raise them above the plane on which they live.

Goethe could do this. As a poet he was sublime, even though as a man he might have been

much better. Yet he assures us that in "all his undertakings he strove to keep his eyes fixed on the highest good." We can learn much from Goethe, and while regretting the weakness of will which kept him from being a practical Christian, we may still admire the work of the Creator in this great intellect. Is not all the beauty in his work a reflection of the One who is Beauty Eternal?

Goethe hated Death, and herein lies the secret of his failure. He put from him all thought of the inevitable, losing sight of Life's true loveliness. He was rooted in the present; he gloried in the light of day and shrank from darkness. Death to him was a malicious foe, which one passed by in silence. When his son had died abroad and a friend came with the sad news, he cut short the tale with the words: "When my son went away, I gave him up as gone for ever." To his family he gave the news in the brief words: "He will not come back." And although he had been deeply attached to the boy, he never alluded to him again.

Nevertheless, though he never spoke of Death, though he hated the very thought of it, it must have obtruded itself upon his reflection very often. He remarked once to a faithful friend: "When one is seventy-five, there is occasionally the thought of dying." They were seated together, watching the setting sun. "But this thought does not disturb me," he continued, "for I am convinced that my spirit is immortal. It is like yon-

der sun, which, indeed, is setting, but which in reality never ceases to shine."

Immortality was the star that illumined the darkness of Death for this poet. He was bound up in the Life of the world, though his reluctant outlook into the world beyond made him realize that Death was not an end, but a beginning. Yet when he came to die, old as he was, he clung to life, and he had to endure a violent struggle before his last hour brought him peace. He must have passed away, assuredly not free from earthly dross, but with the hope that he expressed in the closing scenes of "*Faust*" — the hope that in Eternity, by the power of divine grace, the humanly imperfect may be made perfect.

Goethe, much as he hated Death, looked upon it as a release from toil and slavery, but he refused to see in its deep solemnity the final and supreme penance, the payment of the debt.

Had he but seen Death as those of the faith see it! How marvellous the language, how comforting the force of his genius that would have been devoted to this grandest of themes! Happy are we to whom the path is sure, who have guides and sign-posts all along the way. We have no doubt, no anxiety about that glorious future. With childlike trust we are unafraid and confident that, when the time approaches, the Strong Angel will guide us gently over the dark river and through the boundless waters. Rather than re-

gret our lack of genius, let us rejoice in the strength of our hope.

There can be no joy on earth — no real joy — that does not take its source in the heart of God.

ASPECTS

*Time's years are many, Eternity one,
And one in the infinite.
The chosen are few, few the deeds well done,
For scantness is still Heaven's might.*
—CARDINAL NEWMAN.

THE FACES OF DEATH

ONE and the same thing often appears to us in different aspects, much depends on circumstance and our frame of mind, and similar occurrences may have totally different effects upon us. The self-same word, the self-same action will be met on one occasion with smiles or gratitude, on another with resentment or anger. The actions are the same, the moods are different.

Even so with Death.

Death assumes so many forms. Gentle or savage, kind or cruel, commonplace or noble, he presents a different face to every man or woman. Not that he is different — Death is ever the same. But we greet him according to our mood, according to our frame of mind. He has a different aspect for every human being, since every human being must die in his own, different way.

How will Death come to us? We shall not know until he stands before us, gazing into our eyes. Is there something alarming in this uncertainty? If we are not prepared to meet him — yes! But we cannot lift the veil. We must be content to let it hang between us and the future. If we, conscious of good effort, are ready at any moment to see it parted, and the Strong Angel

emerge and put forth his hand in greeting, then indeed we need not fear. No matter how frightful the form, it will have no terrors for us. If the soul is ready, the body does not matter. Great mercy may be hidden in the sternest glance.

Who decides the death we are to die? The same Hand that fashioned us. The great Creator, who breathed into our souls the breath of life, has decided when and how and where that breath shall return to Him. He is the Lord, in whose keeping are Life and Death and all things!

Why, then, should we dread that which is fore-ordained and fully decided for us? Why should we look to the future with doubt? If He has determined the hour, the place, the manner of our death, remember also that He best knows our conditions. He knows what burdens we must bear, what hopes are centred in us, what anguish our dissolution may cause to loving hearts.

And while we do not understand, we must bow our heads to His inscrutable will. We do not know His reasons . . . we cannot know them. All we know is that the Messenger of Peace, bearing Death in his hands, is an obedient servant, who loves and obeys his Master . . . and we must realize that this Master is our God, who will not put in our chalice a single drop of suffering more than we can bear.

We fear thy face no longer, O Death, and though we may not tell under what form thou wilt approach us, we know that it will be as thou

art sent to us from heaven. Thus and not otherwise do we wish to behold thee.

We ourselves, to a great degree, can determine with what expression Death will approach us. Our lives will shape the expression, and the thoughts of our hearts should be our support. We may not decide the hour, the place, the time, but we can decide the state and condition of our soul.

DEATH, THE GREAT LEVELLER

DEATH is the greatest of levellers; he is more democratic than the most zealous advocate of democracy, who, in defiance of all his principles, can never entirely disregard the position, reputation, and merit of individuals. He is more democratic by far than the law courts of this world, which, with all the good intentions imaginable, can never follow a perfectly fair standard, since they are administered by men whose judgment and opinion are influenced by personal disposition, and by the emotions and prejudices of the age in which they live.

Life itself is positively undemocratic. Men may strive as they will and exert themselves to the utmost; they will never succeed in reducing human existence to a dead level, liable as it is to the ups and downs of fortune. Nature teaches this. Could any cultivation of forest or

field compel all its vegetation to reach one and the same height? Could the blade of grass ever attain the growth of the lofty oak-tree? Can the weather be compelled to follow any definite rule?

As with nature and the elements, so with Life. It is one of the duties of man to mitigate as much as possible the hardships of inequality . . . yet Life remains ever the same, in spite of man.

Death, on the contrary, levels all. Neither rank nor position, neither honour nor merit, neither wealth nor power, neither learning nor fame can stay the course of Death. He passes indifferently over all that men esteem most highly in this world. He treats the poor as tenderly or as harshly as he does the rich. He enters palaces unannounced and does not ask audience when seeking the presence of a king. He is a king in very truth, the world is his kingdom, and his throne is firmly established. Yet this king impartially greets prince and pauper. He carries to the Creator the souls of saint and sinner. He does not disdain to enter the meanest hovel, to wait beside the most beggarly bed. Nothing moves him, nothing impresses him, nothing deters him.

To Death all men are alike . . . to him all are on the same level. He will take the labourer's horny hand in his with as light a touch as he clasps the fingers of a child. All are reduced to the same state. A rich man's body may be clothed in costly attire ere it is laid in its coffin. He may

have a stately funeral, his grave be covered with fragrant flowers, a stately monument raised to his memory. But all this is borrowed splendour, belonging to the living rather than the dead. The dead man is poorer even than Job . . . for Job in all his deprivation still owned the cloak that covered him. Those cold hands, which have held the wealth of this earth in profusion, they are empty now. He leaves the world as he came into the world, having nothing of his own.

Mother Earth has impartial treatment for her children, rich or poor . . . because man is dust, and unto dust he shall return. All men are brought to this level by Death. All men have one entrance into Life, we read in the Book of Wisdom. Here, at his very coming into the world, Pride is given its first blow, and man is taught humility if he cares to learn it.

“All men have the same going out.” Death emphasizes the lesson of equality, and we are again admonished to be humble. Why do we not learn the lesson? Why does it not bind us more closely together in mutual charity? We are equal at our coming into Life and again at our going out therefrom. Why, then, should we not display more brotherly love, knowing that the Strong Angel will come with smiling eyes and kindly lips if we have sent before us the priceless gifts of humility and charity which our Saviour asks from every one of us.

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Oh how, lying on our deathbeds, we shall wish that we could undo any harm we have wrought! That we could yet fulfil those good impulses whispered into our ears by our guardian angel! That we could make those little sacrifices which we deemed so hard and which now, glancing backward, seem so easy! How our neglect will appall us! And how trivial will seem the things which we thought so important!

DEATH, THE ARISTOCRAT

DEATH is likewise an aristocrat. He has no equals. He passes through the world in dignified solitude, like a mighty lord, peerless and supreme.

But these are merely the outward signs of aristocracy.

Death is on familiar terms with no one. The mightiest of the earth cannot boast of his favour. His dominion is absolute, unquestioned, limited neither by law nor precedent, subservient to no rights or claims.

There is more than one kind of aristocracy. We speak of the aristocracy of birth, overvalued by some, depreciated by others. Aristocracy of birth no longer enjoys the prestige it once held, for it has a formidable rival in the aristocracy of wealth, existing solely by right of money power.

Neither of these bestows energy or brains; both dwindle before the God-given aristocracy of intellect, which owes nothing to ancestry or wealth and is attained by genius only. The great philosopher, the great poet, the great artist, they all have this genius bestowed upon them by the Creator; but unless they make earnest use of it, they may never rise in the ranks of the aristocracy of intellect.

There is an aristocracy greater than these, one even more dignified; it is the aristocracy of the soul, nobility of heart, not bestowed by rank, possessions, or education, and independent of caste and of outward rules and forms. It can flourish anywhere, in the workman's cottage as in the royal palace.

This aristocracy of the spirit enjoys a rare distinction, a peculiar privilege. Death, brushing aside all other claims, recognizes this one. This aristocracy only is recognized in the spirit world, and being himself of high rank in that world, Death sees in those who possess this aristocracy his peers. Nobility of soul may be displayed in all the circumstances of Life, but only in Death is its full force, its full beauty revealed. Much that seemed important in Life looks trifling in Death. Death strips man of all disguises. Also all small frailties or imperfections that concealed or disfigured the noble soul in Life vanish at Death, and the soul soars aloft in splendour and dignity.

Respecting naught else, Death shows himself in this of true aristocratic character.

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Our human nature, prone, through Adam's fall, to pride and love of luxury, doth shun humiliation, and vanity will often claim us. To Thee, O God, we look for aid when overwhelmed by weakness. Let Thy guardian Angel whisper insistently in our ear, when ambition takes our thoughts from Thee: "How small will appear the esteem of man beside the judgment of heaven!"

THE TOILERS

THERE are many to whom God assigns the lot that Solomon rated so highly. The world does not envy them, and they themselves, perhaps, are not aware of their good fortune.

Yet in a special manner they have all that conduces to happiness during Life, and better still, they possess the inestimable faculty of dying well. Whoever has often stood beside a deathbed will confirm this, for among the toilers we find most often those to whom may be applied the words which Tertullian used of the Christians — "the race prepared for Death." They never fail to do their best to preserve health and strength, but if remedies beyond their reach are required, they calmly forego them and then face Death as an act of Divine Providence. They do not unduly

cling to Life, catching at every straw, lamenting their fate, bewailing the approaching end; to them it is not an amazing thing that they have to follow the path which, sooner or later, all must follow.

To face Death with grief and lamentation may be understandable, but it is undignified. Men without great possessions to leave behind them utter as a rule no loud protestations. They have no quarrel with God, who is sending His Angel when He pleases and how He pleases.

Perhaps they do not suffer such loss as these others feel when paying the debt of nature. They have laboured long, mindful of the words: "In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat thy bread." They have known the joy of work accomplished. They have coöperated in the good work of the world. They have lived honest, useful lives. They have suffered, too, at times, and recovered and gone on again, content as long as idleness remained far from them. To them life seemed like a working day. They rose in the morning, rested and refreshed. They worked hard until noontime. They finished the day's labour and then, as the shades of evening deepened, sat down happily among their loved ones to enjoy the well-earned rest.

Death, at the end, is as the shades of evening after a day of hard toil . . . a period of rest and peace. These toilers are resigned. The Strong Angel comes to assist them over the great river,

as he has already assisted a countless many. Life has brought them much that was hard to bear, and they have borne it all. Surely they will be able to bear the burden of Death, the last of their trials.

But is Death really a great trial for these toilers? Generally they have lived righteously. They have reared their families in the fear and love of God, teaching them to love work as God's greatest blessing . . . and they know that God will not forsake them or theirs. Do they fear the judgment? We are all poor sinners . . . but the Son of God died for us on the Cross, the Son of God, who lived on earth the life of men, who worked on earth as men must work. Will He not look with kindness on these people who work so faithfully for themselves and for Him?

Thus viewed, Death is not a trial. A man whose heart knows no evil, whose conscience is of itself a source of consolation, need not tremble when the Strong Angel approaches. What rare joy it is to stand at the bedside of such an one, who makes ready for the last journey with calm recollection, with fearlessness. Truly these are of "the race prepared for Death." And the failing eyes light up once more to new beauty, greeting Death as a welcome messenger. What sweetness, what dignity, touching and simple, in the departure of such a soul!

Once I saw a painting, which the artist had

named "Death, the Friend." It was a beautiful picture, full of happy thought and deep meaning. An aged bellringer has fallen asleep in his little room in the belfry. Long years of faithful performance of his humble task have made him weary. The sun is setting over the distant hills; a tiny bird, perched on the windowsill, is looking inquisitively into the room. But the old man sees nothing. His eyes are closed, his hands folded. The other figure in the picture is Death, garbed as a pilgrim, grasping the rope in the old man's stead and ringing the bell for the end of day — for the end, too, of the faithful bellringer's earthly life.

He has gently passed away at the end of a long and useful Life . . . and it is significant that Death is seen with a palm branch, the symbol of victory and of glory.

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"Wealth!" cries the miser; "Success!" cries ambition; "Ease!" cries the worldling; "Fame!" cries the proud . . . no matter at what cost! But in us who know and understand, there rises no undue craving for any of these things. Wealth, success, ease, fame are in the keeping of Christ, our Saviour, and we would wish for naught that is not in accord with His divine will, naught which will not tend to His greater honour and glory.

CRUSHED FLOWERS

WHAT death is sweeter, more hallowed than the death of a little child? A pure soul, fresh from the hand of God, takes root in this earth, begins to put forth tiny leaves and tender blossoms, to the eager delight of those who love it and tend it carefully. But Death comes its way, and the sweet flower is broken off before even its first beauty has fully unfolded itself to loving gaze.

An infant may suffer in its passing, but its parents suffer most. They see Death close . . . so very close to their darling treasure. With breaking hearts they dread to hear that last fluttering breath, the last sigh, which will announce that heaven has gained an angel and earth lost one.

Fortunately the infant knows nothing of Death or its solemnity. It is still too close to God to be afraid. Physical suffering it may not be spared, but mental agony it knows not. It is carried tenderly into Eternity, on the strong and gentle arms of the Angel, from a fevered dream on earth to the jubilant songs of the choirs of heaven. It will never taste Life's bitterness, never realize the horrible treachery of sin. Tenderly it slips away, unstained by earth, its little soul rejoining the heavenly spirits as one of them.

On the other hand, what more heart-breaking than the agony of those who watch it go? And

if, as may happen, it must suffer much pain, the anguish of the parents is nigh unbearable. Why, oh why, a father will ask, must such pain be inflicted on this tiny body which has never known sin?

But alas, poor father, poor mother, to suffer for the faults of others is not the greatest of evils. Your little one is bearing testimony to a deep, incomprehensible mystery, to the inheritance of original sin, from which none of Adam's descendants are exempt.

All suffering is a grace . . . suffering has the power to ennoble ever since the Son of God suffered and bore His Cross for us. Do not grudge your little child a portion of Christ's bitter Cross. It cannot yet pray nor work; it can suffer.

Suffering is the first thing of which we are capable on our entrance into Life — our morning and evening sacrifice. And since Jesus Christ suffered, a royal dignity is bestowed upon suffering. Bow your heads to the will of God and adore, knowing that nothing ordained by God is without God's purpose.

Yet, in spite of lofty thoughts, try as we may to be resigned, we cannot bear to see the suffering of a child. There may be a little consolation in the thought that it cannot feel as intensely as an older person might. Suffering is gauged by consciousness rather than by bodily manifestations. No heavier load is laid upon the child than he can bear.

We mourn the crushed flower. When a little coffin is lowered into the grave, there are buried with it many sweet hopes. With our other dead we bury the past, but with these young flowers we bury the future, the hope which will never be forgotten.

And the mother will keep green the memory of the little one who went from her in its infancy.

Yet the child has not lived in vain; that which here was incomplete has developed into one of heaven's fair flowers. It has passed from Death to Life . . . and Life means progress, growth, advancement. What has been taken away so soon that we hardly seemed to possess it, is not lost to us for ever. Fittingly may we plant evergreens on the grave of the child. Grave and anxious thought may walk with us to the graves of those ripened in years . . . but heaven's own pledge adorns the shrines of the innocent.

The virtue that would most please the Lord, when Death approaches us, is the virtue that His most holy Mother knew in all its divine perfection, the virtue of resignation.

GRANDFATHER

TOWARD evening, if the air is soft and balmy, grandfather strolls out into the garden, where his cherished armchair awaits him. It

is like an old friend, this armchair, waiting there contentedly for its chum; and when the old man moves, cautiously, as befits his years, down the path, the waiting chair seems to call cheerfully out to him: "Come . . . come and rest. You have worked long, you have worked well. Lean back in me comfortably, place your head upon my cushions! Now let us take our ease and think of times gone by."

The old man enjoys this hour. He drowzes in the cosey chair, and the sunshine, warming his grateful limbs, seems to rest in golden benediction on his white hair. Sometimes a bird, braver than its fellows, ventures on the branch overhead, singing its cheering tune; or the old cat comes purring, arching her back and rubbing against the old man's knee; or the faithful dog demands attention and pokes his head into the wrinkled hand. Pleasing tokens of affection, these; but the sweetest and dearest of all come from the little grandchild, a curly-haired lassie, with cheeks like apple-blossoms, and the voice of a silver bell. It is her delight to play in the grass at granddaddy's feet, to lay out a tiny garden, and as she plays she prattles and laughs and sings. Now and again she runs off, and then grandfather is allowed to doze peacefully, lulled by the humming of the bees in the clustering blossoms around him.

But when the shadows finally lengthen and the sun goes down, a last ray lingering on the old white head, as if loath to leave, the little child is

sure to be at hand. "Shall we go in now, grandfather? Let me help you, dear." And her soft little fingers grasping his hand, she walks attentively beside him, carefully pointing out any stone that might cause him to stumble. "Grandfather, here is the path; grandfather, here is a stone; grandfather, here are the steps."

A charming picture.

To-day the old man is again sitting there in the sunshine, in his big old chair. He is quite happy, quite content. The roses spend their fragrance round about him, and the honeysuckle wafts its refreshing odour on every breeze. Summer is at its height, and autumn nigh.

When grandfather thinks of Death, as he occasionally does, he is wont to say: "Well! I wish I were over the mountain!" His father used the same quaint expression and he remembers it. He has no fear of Death. A useful life lies behind him, Eternity is before him. He is ready to go, though when he thinks of crossing the mountain his soul feels a little anxiety.

He seems to be unusually tired to-day. He is not thinking of Death or of the future, but of the past. Pleasant memories begin to crowd in upon him. His heart grows light . . . but . . . why are his eyes so dim? Has the sun gone down? Why, then, is the little girl not there to take him home?

Ah, behold! not the little girl, but a stranger approaches, of kindly and gentle countenance.

He bends over the aged form and whispers: "Grandfather, come! To-day I will take you — home."

And the old man wonderingly stretches forth a trembling hand which the stranger, the Angel, takes in his own, with a touch even softer than that of the little girl.

The sun has set indeed! Now the merry child comes running down the garden path, but the gentle face no longer turns toward her smilingly. The head is bent, the eyes are closed. Grandfather has gone, to cross the mountain which he so dreaded when weighed down by earthly weariness . . . but oh, how easy and joyous the ascent of the liberated soul!

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A SHORT STEP

DEATH does not always give warning of his approach. Disease and pain are not invariably his forerunners, nor old age and debility. At times he speedily arrives, when least expected.

While we often witness that the human body, that delicate piece of machinery, has great powers of endurance, at other times we observe that the merest trifle is enough to end for ever its activities. A little artery in that complicated organism gives way, and the strong man is doomed and beyond all human aid.

And may we be ever so well prepared, a death

of this sort seems terrible to us. Our friend who, full of life and vigour, has just exchanged hearty greetings with us, whose warm, strong hand has just clasped ours, is suddenly stricken to the ground. The shock of such an experience is almost overpowering to our human nature. A feeling of insecurity haunts us. Everything seems different. Even the sunshine has lost for us its cheer and brightness.

One who has witnessed such a death will not easily forget it. The worldly world regards a sudden death as a boon. No pain, no suffering, no anguish . . . all is over in an instant! What better ending could one wish, say they. But we Christians do not agree with the world, praying instead that God may deliver us from a sudden or unlooked-for death.

If Death would end all; if it were a leap into nothingness, followed by oblivion . . . then the world would be correct — a sudden death would indeed be a desirable end.

But Death does not end all; it is not independent of Life; it is but a link, connecting earth with heaven. The important thing is not whether the dying man has left his material affairs in shape. The great thing is whether the affairs of his soul are in perfect order. He is leaving one world to enter another, where he is to render account.

If we are always ready to meet our Judge, we need not fear even sudden death, though we

should like a little time for recollection, a few moments in which to glance over our account with God, so that we may be quite sure that all is well with us as far as this is in our power. A few moments — to prepare the soul, to cleanse it in the waters of Penance, to clothe it in wedding garment by partaking once more of the Precious Body and Blood of the Lord. But if it is to be otherwise — if it be decreed that we must go to Him in our everyday attire, abruptly out of our worldly affairs — we must remember He is the Lord, just and merciful. Let us not fail to pray: “From a sudden and unlooked-for death, deliver us, O Lord!” But above all, Thy will be done!

How uncertain Life is, how foolish the world which pursues the good things of earth, neglecting heaven. But the world is ours, too, and it is what we make it. We who are taught to value the things of Life at their proper worth must employ them to advantage. Let us help those who need our help; comfort the sorrowing; uplift the fallen; bear with the weak; and aid the strong in their efforts toward the right.

BEARING THE CROSS

TO some poor souls the last part of their way through Life is truly a way of the Cross. They must suffer long before they die, and their suffering is often very great. With pitiful heart

we commiserate those who bear so heavy a burden, who suffer pain of body and mind, and vainly seek relief.

It is hard to bear our grief in silence and resignation. God does not seem to listen to our fervent prayers for the relief of some one dear to us. We ask why He will not listen.

Then is the time of supreme test of our faith. God is still there and not forgetting His beloved ones. Murmur not; our murmur of rebellion may reach His ears, offending Him with our doubt of His goodness. He knows best. He bids the waiting, suffering heart: Be still, soon you will be comforted!

We gaze in silence at the white, drawn face and listen to the laboured painful breathing. "O Death, deliver him from this terrible agony," we whisper. "Why dost thou delay so long?" At last there comes the moment of release; the last sigh is breathed. A solemn silence settles upon the dead. The way of the Cross is at an end; the poor, weary bearer of the Cross is at rest.

But our hearts throb with pain . . . a pain sometimes that seems unbearable. We are saddened by the inscrutable ways of God, though we dare not question them. So many there are in the world, friendless, and alone, to whom Life seems a burden too heavy to be borne, longing for delivery from this life, yet Death passes them by while one so useful, so successful, so much needed, is ruthlessly taken away.

But surely in the Cross itself lies the solution of this mystery.

Think of our Saviour!

Crowned with thorns, cruelly scourged, He drags the heavy Cross along the stony and dusty road, up the ascent to Calvary, amidst the hostility and contempt of the people. And He lifts the bowed head and gazes at us — earnestly, sadly. His faint voice says: "If to the green wood they do these things, what shall be done to the dry?"

Do not these words strike deep into our hearts? All that is human is dry, lifeless wood. We all have incurred the guilt of sin; we all are under the curse. Therefore it behooves us to submit to the Cross.

The Cross of Penance is rich in graces.

Our Saviour fell beneath His Cross, and a man then helped Him carry it. Happy Simon of Cyrene, chosen for this divine mission! The beloved dead lying before us is such another Simon, called by our Lord to accompany Him to Golgotha, permitted to carry the Cross. Does not this comfort us? It should, it must!

Let us ascend to the top of the mountain. See the blood-stained Cross gleaming forth in the surrounding darkness, at its foot the Mother of Sorrows. Why should she, the pure and sinless one, "our tainted nature's solitary boast," stand there? Why should she be stricken with such agony of soul? She is, as it were, fine gold, yet

cast into the furnace, although in her there was no alloy of evil.

And she, our beloved Mother, full of grace, receives here her final, supreme consecration: the consecration of suffering, the royal purple of martyrdom! Suffering is not only intended to cleanse and purify; it is to mature and ennoble, raising the soul above itself, above earth; it is a privilege reserved for the elect, a sacred mark which the Bridegroom sets upon His own.

Our Lord desires to lead us onward and upward, but He does this in His own way. "As the heavens are high above the earth, so are My ways above your ways," saith the Lord.

It is for us to submit and adore. Cast, then, another glance upon the lifeless body of the one we have loved. The heavier his Cross, the deeper should be our reverence. Our impulsive hearts must be restrained. We must not question, nor lament too loudly.

Rather should we salute Death, the Strong Angel, who has come to lead to reward.

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"To suffer or to die, O Lord; to suffer or to die!" is the pleading of one of God's greatest saints; and though we shall never attain to her degree of spirituality, at least we can emulate her spirit and meekly accept that which God sees fit to put upon us. Physical suffering is not the greatest; there is a suffering of the spirit which

far exceeds bodily pain. Whatever suffering be ours, either of body or soul, God sends it to us for a wise purpose, for our benefit.

HE CANNOT DIE

WE hear this said, sometimes, of a dying person, and the words are whispered in awestruck tone: "How he clings to Life! He cannot die!"

Death, the inevitable, is waiting patiently, almost sorrowfully. The sick man is exhausted by the struggle, yet he does not die. Death bends over him, but does not touch him. His time is not yet. His speech may have gone from him, his sight may be dimmed, but the chest still falls and rises, and the end seems no nearer.

Why does the soul linger? Why does Death wait with such patience? Does the attachment for the world hold Life so fast? Powerful are a man's will and energy — and he may cling to Life with such tenacity that Death is forced to delay his work. What a mournful spectacle! Life is not the greatest gift, and ought not to be battled for as if it were.

Or perhaps it is some overwhelming, ungratified wish that thus detains the soul — an important matter which must be set in order; the absence of some loved face which he would see once more, or a love as strong as Death. Per-

haps there is one to whom his heart is passionately cleaving — one who without him will be destitute and in danger. God has implanted this deep love in his heart and is now purging it in the furnace. It must endure the fires of separation ere it can be crowned with the garland of Eternity. Let us have confidence in God, placing the loved one whom we cannot protect in His almighty hands, where he or she will rest secure.

Ah, but perhaps . . . alas, the possibility is not a remote one! . . . there is some unatoned for sin which has this poor soul in its deadly grip, prolonging the fearful struggle. Death cannot intervene. The soul struggles against a sin which from its secret consciousness, from its hidden depths, where it has been lurking, comes forth now, demon-like, seeking to devour its prey. It comes forward, no longer bland and persuasive, but boldly torturing the poor soul it has beguiled.

And we look on, consumed with pity, unable to read beneath this fight for Life, only hoping that the struggle may prove a means of grace, that the soul may go before its Maker cleansed from guilt, or that, as in the instance of the poor thief on the Cross, an act of true contrition may be vouchsafed at the last moment. But do not judge, beware of conclusions. Respect his, or her, secret sorrow. You will have your own scruples and anxieties.

With Thine own hands, O Lord, loosen the

bonds which might otherwise hold us fast. Give us release, the sooner to enter Thy blessed presence.

FACE TO FACE

WE read in the Old Testament that when Moses came down from Mount Sinai he was obliged to veil his face, because his people were terrified by the resplendence which had been imparted to the face of Moses when he received God's message.

So Death veils his face from us and does not draw the veil aside until the last breath passes our quivering lips, knowing that we, in our mortal weakness, cannot endure the terror of his sight, which God willed he should have for us.

God conceals from us the hour of our death. If we knew it, could we look on Death with serene mind? Death would indeed stand unveiled before us, face to face. But could we endure his sight? Even those stricken with fatal disease, suspecting, knowing that the end is near, are permitted to fondly hope for a few weeks, a few days more. Rarely does Death lift his veil even to them.

It has been my lot to see one human being who knew the hour of his death — an experience never to be forgotten.

A number of years ago I spent an entire night in the company of a young man who, in spite of good health and great strength, was looking Death

in the face. The night was a mild one in February, calm and peaceful, with stars shining here and there through the clouds. There was a suggestion of spring in the air, and nature seemed to be joyously awakening, pulsing with Life, making the blood course more rapidly through the veins. One was glad to be alive.

But ah, what a difference when that prison door closed behind me with a clang, and I walked down a cold, bare corridor, to the cell where a poor wretch was awaiting the consolation which only a priest can give. A murderer . . . unhappy, gloomy, but repentant. He was condemned to die in expiation for the blood that he had brutally shed.

St. Augustine says: "There is no sin ever committed by man that thou mightest not also commit if God should forsake thee!" I had pondered over these words ere coming here to offer what consolation and help I could.

The heart of man is an abyss . . . and much as we may detest the sin, we must not despise the sinner. For no man can look into the depths of human hearts without perceiving how forcefully, how intricately circumstances and influences are woven together to make or mar a life. Well for us that there is One who holds the balance in His almighty hand!

This man was lying on his cot, motionless, his face buried in his hands. He had hoped to the very last for a pardon. Only an hour before had

he learned that all effort had failed. There would be no reprieve . . . he must die the following morning. This news had completely crushed him.

But our religion has the power to bridge the depths of despair. The whole world may abandon the wretched sinner, but the Church opens her arms — the arms of a loving Mother. She receives the confession of crime poured forth from a tortured and penitent heart, and *Ego te absolvo* — I absolve thee — she says, and the words are like a soothing hand laid on a burning brow. Fervent prayer goes up from that delivered heart to the throne of God. Our Lord graciously bends down; a lost sheep has been returned to the fold.

The candles flickered, the guards stood rigid and watchful. The confession had been heard — the last confession — and now the prisoner was about to receive the Bread of Life . . . Christ bestowed upon him the kiss of peace.

Soon, however, the fervour of that moment began to wane, and the condemned man realized that every moment brought him nearer to his doom. He was restless, unnerved. Again and again he would ask: "How much longer?" The prison clock tolled the hours; inexorably they went. I prayed aloud; he joined in my prayers whenever he could fix his thoughts upon them. The moments passed — slowly, yet so swiftly.

No one can go through an experience like this without keenly sharing the misery of such a man.

The poor prisoner, face to face with Death,

knowing the very minute of its coming, was filled with a speechless anguish, with a terror of soul that roused all the compassion of which I was capable. I suffered with him most intensively. At last the dreaded hour arrived. He gave me his rosary, the only keepsake he had. Suddenly the cell door was thrown open, the grim procession formed. He went, outwardly calm. I accompanied him. But once more his eyes met mine, and the wild anguish in that gaze made me heart-sick.

Soon all was over. As I went home the very sunshine was distasteful to me. Joy seemed to have vanished from my life for ever. I had looked deep, deep into the anguish of a human soul meeting its doom.

Poor soul, so misguided, so frail! I prayed God that since thou didst penitently accept thy death, that very acceptance prove thy expiation!

“There is no sin ever committed by man that thou also mightest not commit should God forsake thee!” Let us but bear these words in mind, and we shall be truly humble.

BLOOD-STAINED LAURELS

THE great war is on. The church bells are tolling to announce a glorious victory. But on entering the church, for thanksgiving, the first

sight that struck our eyes was an old lady, kneeling in deep mourning before the statue of the Mother of Sorrow, shedding the sad and pitiful tears of a mother whose only son has been taken from her . . . killed on the battlefield.

Ah, how many mothers have so knelt these days! Who can count the tears that have been shed to mark every victory? How anxiously those long and portentous lists have been scanned; how bated the breath, how heavy the heart as we read the names of those fallen in battle.

O Death, Death, *here* is thy victory; O grave, *here* is thy sting!

Sorrow has reigned in innumerable households, softened only by the thought that the loved ones perished in a cause which they felt to be just; perished for their country. Patriotism and heroic courage have been conspicuous. Life assumed new dignity in the countries at war, since those who lived felt ennobled by the death which those near and dear to them had suffered. Loneliness for the living, laurels for the dead!

On the battlefield Death does not always come at the supreme moment, the moment of high tension, of dashing courage. The wounded painfully wait for the approach of the Angel, their lifeblood slowly ebbing away.

The noise of battle has ceased; the sun is rising; the lark soars upward, its cheerful song strangely contrasting with the scene. Forsaken,

forgotten, there lies a wounded man, unable either to live or to die, thinking . . . of what?

Certainly not of the battle he has fought . . . of the enemy he has helped to vanquish or who has vanquished him. Ah, no, his thoughts turn to tenderer themes. His mother, perhaps, far off in the old home, who pauses suddenly in her work, turns to the cottage door, and fearfully listens for steps. The sudden foreboding at her heart, the moisture that dims her eyes, the fear that sets her lips trembling!

She breathes a prayer that God may preserve her boy, not knowing, poor mother, that even then Death has softly come upon him, bestowing peace, the peace of eternity.

Men call war the Avenging Angel, sped by God's wrath over the world. Or the Savage Fury, let loose from hell, trampling upon our richest blessings, destroying the best and strongest of us. Or the Great Awakener, whose mailed hand wrenches our hearts and turns them on higher things. Perhaps there is truth in all of these sayings.

The heroes who died are at rest in their peaceful graves. The plough passes over them, the green grass springs forth, fresh, sparkling with dew. The anguish is forgotten, the victory remains, the glorious victory of those who fought and perished for it.

But the mother does not forget. Kneeling in her quiet sanctuary she prays with bowed head

and lips that move, but issue no sound. Her heart cannot forget, even though her pride in her brave and heroic son is something she would not relinquish.

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For the dying! In all our prayers let us not forget those who will this day pass out of the world and stand before God's throne. "For those who are to die this day we beseech Thy mercy, O Lord!"

ST. ELIZABETH

WHO has not read the story of the holy princess St. Elizabeth of Hungary, that most gracious royal lady and saint, whose death was no less beautiful than her life? She was born in a palace and died in a cottage. When Death approached he came to her radiant as an angel of light, for once rejoicing in his mission. St. Elizabeth's whole life was a canticle of love, rising ever higher the more heavily the crown pressed upon her; and so death, too, came to her under strains of joy.

As she lay on her deathbed the bystanders seemed to hear her singing softly, though her lips did not move. The room was filled with an indescribably beautiful music. After a while she said, in a low voice: "Did you hear the angels singing? I tried to sing with them."

She passed away on November 19, 1231. As the clock struck midnight her pale face began to glow once more with the bloom of health, until it shone so that those around her bed could hardly bear its brilliancy. Eternity was approaching, and its radiance gladdened her countenance. As a rule she was given to silence, but now, in the excess of her love for God, she spoke and prayed much. Suddenly she stopped, exclaiming: "The Bridegroom is coming! Let us welcome Him!" Then, turning her head aside, she closed her eyes as in sleep . . . to awaken to everlasting joy. Again the celestial singing was heard. Death, the Strong Angel, sang a hymn of praise as he carried her soul away, as softly and gently as a mother carries her infant. The saint's pale face shone, transfigured with beauty . . . all the loveliness of her youth returned, hallowed by the glory which her departing saintly soul bestowed upon its earthly dwelling. Her life had been hapless and one of suffering, strewn with thorns, but her death was happy and joyous; she died amid light, sweet perfume, and melody; in holy ecstasy.

When we read of such a death as this we would exclaim, with St. Francis: "Dear Brother Death!" It makes us realize, once more, that beneath that mysterious veil an angelic countenance is hidden — a countenance always serious, often stern, but invariably showing sympathy and tenderness in his sad eyes. Dear Brother Death, how kindly didst thou come to meet St. Elizabeth.

We may not expect such a greeting from thee, since we are not saints, dear Brother; we are poor erring mortals, and for us the Lord will not remove the seal of silence. We crave but a ray of light, a little comfort in our last struggle. Yet no matter under what form thou comest, thou art sent by the Father in heaven.

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There is joy for us in the death of God's saints, for Death is the crown of Eternal Life to them. In heaven their greatest happiness is that which was theirs on earth, praying for poor sinners. Let us ask the blessed saints to plead with our Saviour for us, and for our brethren.

ROYAL PURPLE

THE sun was setting. Slowly it disappeared over the western hills; gloriously the final rays of gold coloured the attending clouds. The sun was dying, as it were, approaching the end of its course with majestic calm, cheerful composure, its beauty most impressive as it faded. The mist rose, but it could not obscure the radiant resplendence. The golden rays became charged with purple. The sun was dying in splendour, as befits a sovereign.

Death in royal purple, contemptuous of Death. To such a death did the early martyrs go forth,

smiling as if on the way to a banquet. Their life was like the sun, pure and radiant, a life unspotted by the earth, raised far above all earthly dross. Theirs was a Life with power to awaken Life, as the sun awakens Life in nature. Hatred and scorn and persecution encompassed them like threatening fumes, but even as the glory of the setting sun transfigures the rising mist, so did the calm virtue of the martyrs triumph over the hate of their tormentors. Their joy of soul was a golden glory which no man could take away from them, and the outrages visited upon them only served to clothe them with the royal purple.

They were so triumphant, so strong, so invincible that their foes became alarmed, ascribing the powers of such endurance to some sort of magic. But the only magic the martyrs used was that of divine grace and of all-conquering love.

Love is stronger than Death — a flame that lives on and on, never to be extinguished. And so died those Christian heroes, like the sun, in a setting of golden glory and royal purple, to rise in splendour in another world, their death a splendid testimony to the divine power of Christianity.

The martyrs died, not intoxicated by fanaticism, not carried away by an excess of morbid excitation, but with calm composure and utter clearness of mind. They died valiantly, not with drawn swords in their hands, in the rush and excitement of battle, urged on by the enthusiasm of the hour. Far from it. They suffered alone, dis-

honoured, defenseless, delivered to intense cruelty. They went, not like meteors that rush blazing to destruction, but like the sun, in dignity, in victory, in glory.

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The sun has almost vanished over the hills. There has been no haste, no struggle. It is going, clad in royal purple, robed in kingly dignity.

One of the lessons which the death of the martyrs can teach us is that forces exist superior to all the terror and the violence with which the evil one may strive to clothe Death. Let pagans — of modern no less than of ancient times — bow in abject fear before him whom they call the King of Terrors, not we, for we do not fear him. There is no need. We have God's grace, we have a living faith, we have charity and hope — and by these we know that Death is but the Messenger of the Most High.

The sun has set; its traces are still in the sky, painted in gold and rose. Oh, ye saints and holy martyrs, who by your lifeblood bore witness to Christ, so does the afterglow of your death shine upon the skies that bound now our spiritual horizon, shining from age to age, instilling in our faint hearts hope, strength, and consolation.

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Through all the centuries the endurance of the Catholic Church has been the lasting marvel of the admiring world. No storm could shake her

foundations, no evils daunt her soul. We know that we are safe under the shadow of her mantle. Safe in Life, safe in Death, safe in Eternity.

THE SULAMITE

AMONG the many holy places in Palestine there is one near Mount Sion marked by a stately church — the Church of the Assumption.

A death took place on the site marked by this church, a death more wonderful than any death that ever preceded or followed it. We can scarcely call it Death. In no other instance has the Strong Angel assumed so gracious a form. He came as a friend, a deliverer, an envoy, sent to bring home the royal bride. Our Lady's spotless soul was in his keeping for a little while, but the destruction that accompanies Death did not touch her chaste and holy body. Her loving Son received her body into the realm of light, and Life Eternal, both of soul and body, was hers, who never knew the stain of sin.

After our Lord's death on the Cross we can well imagine that, though bodily existing here, His blessed Mother dwelt in spirit in another Life. Yet she was to remain on earth. There was work for her to do — the infant Church needed her loving presence. But nothing could restrain the impetuous longing of her heart, and it was thus she awaited the hour of her release. Like David,

her forefather, she prayed: "Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me!"

She is the Sulamite of the Canticle. She is the Bride, seeking her Beloved, lamenting that she cannot find Him.

"I sought Him whom my soul loveth. I sought Him and found Him not."

"I will rise and go about the city: in the streets and the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him and I found Him not." (Cant. iii. 1, 2.)

Again and again she paced the streets of Jerusalem, even to the desolate summit of Golgotha. She sought Him and found Him not. Her soul languished with love and longing, and her love consumed her very life.

"Love is as strong as Death . . . the lamps thereof are fire and flames." (Cant. viii. 6.)

Day followed upon day, each fraught with sorrow and suffering, with weighty duties and constant cares . . . things that serve to distract other minds, but were powerless to affect her soul or her love.

"Many waters cannot quench charity; neither can the floods drown it." (Cant. viii. 7.)

At last the desired hour was nigh. In her solitude she heard the summons: "The voice of my Beloved, behold He cometh. . . . Behold my Beloved speaketh to me, 'Arise, make haste, My love, My dove, My beautiful one, and come.'" (Cant. ii. 8, 10.)

She had no fear of Death. She had but welcome for him, for beyond she saw only the Beloved. Her earthly life was the means of separation between them.

“Behold, He standeth behind our wall, looking through the windows, looking through the lattices.” (Cant. ii. 9.) Not Death, it was Life that called to her. “The voice of my Beloved, knocking, ‘Open to Me, My sister, My love, My dove, My undefiled.’” (Cant. v. 2.)

Our Lady’s spirit greeted Death. “Like a cloud of incense rising from the desert” did she hasten to pass through the dark gate — dark to all of us, but light to her, bright with the rainbow colour of hope.

There are few among us poor mortals who do not feel at least a little regret at leaving this world, and sorrow at parting with those we love; but to her Death was the purest joy. Those about her might cry out: “Return, return, O fair one, that we may behold thee!” But naught could detain her. Who could check such a mighty flame of love leaping up exultantly toward the heavens?

Truly there was one death, then, that cannot be regarded as Death. It was more glorious than even the sunset, rich in splendour and beauty. Rather it was the

“rosy light
Of dawn that rose above the darkness
And conquered all the shades of night.”

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The Queen of heaven, our loving Mother, rejoices that earth has relinquished its hold on her and that at last she is with her Beloved. O Mother mine, upon my dying bed come to me, thy child. Whisper words of courage into my ears, sustain my failing heart. Into thy hands I place my life and my death.

ANXIETIES

*The burden of my days is hard to bear,
But God knows best;
And I have prayed — but vain has been my prayer
For rest — sweet rest!
'Tis hard to plant in Spring and never reap
The Autumn yield.*

— FATHER RYAN.

THE KEEPER OF THE VALLEY

SCHOPENHAUER, the philosopher, with his wonted sneer summed up his view of Life in the words: "If Life were to be preferred to non-existence, if it were really a precious possession, there would be no need to post at the exit the ghastly sentry of Death and the terrors that attend him. If Death were less dreadful, who would care to continue in this Life?"

These remarks come from a man who despised Life and who taught others to despise it, and yet they contain a germ of truth worthy of consideration. Even though we Christians face the thought of dying with the resignation born of our faith, we well know that Death is a punishment and a penance.

Our all-wise Creator had a wholesome end in view when He encompassed Death with many terrors. Still God's justice and God's wisdom are inseparable from God's mercy, and from the pessimist's embittered words we may evolve a thought quite Christian in character. When creating us, God imbued us with a strong desire to live; without this strong desire the earth would long have become a deserted wilderness. This impulse, this desire has secured the continuation of

the human race, in spite of the vicissitudes of Life. Moreover, throughout our entire existence in this world we have at hand a vigilant guardian who makes his voice heard when danger threatens us. This guardian is Pain.

Without the warnings of pain we should be reckless of our health and of the preservation of Life. And, in the same way, the terrors that guard the gate of Death serve the wise purpose of a deterrent for those who might otherwise wickedly waste or throw away God's precious gift of Life. Death, therefore, is the guardian of Life, and his terrors are the outcome of God's wisdom and love.

There is a picture by a famous modern painter which has attracted much attention; it is a picture of Death. A youth clad in full armour is standing on a hill crest, looking down into the dark valley at his feet. It is night; the skies are clear and dotted with stars. He has taken off his helmet, and the grave yet exquisite face is quite distinct. A halo of light hovers over his head and a banner streams behind him. His is a remarkable figure of youthful strength and stateliness. The artist called his picture, "The Keeper of the Valley."

Death is the keeper of the valley. A mighty angel, bearing the standard of victory; a holy messenger, grave yet kindly, sent to do God's bidding. Man must not make him henchman by destroying wilfully the life that God has given

him. He must await the hour that is appointed — the hour when the keeper descends into the valley to summon the soul to the heights.

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We who are in the valley must ever keep our eyes on the stars — and Death the warrior shall have no terrors for us! When Life seems hard and our sorrows crush us to the ground, let us remember that we *are* in the valley, and that every pain we endure for God is raising us out of it toward the silent Keeper, the Strong Angel, who will finally bear us triumphantly onward to the goal, heaven!

THE FEAR OF DEATH

THERE is a story of a young prince who was condemned to death. He had been a daring warrior, had fought valiantly in many battles. An act of grave disobedience brought upon his head the death sentence.

The sentence stuns him. He broods over it. He who has vanquished Death in many forms is at last to die. The youth in him rebels. For the first time he flinches, and when he sees his grave being dug by torchlight, his self-control deserts him. Forgetful of propriety, of honour, of everything but Death, he throws himself upon his knees, begging for mercy. Soon, however,

his dread is overcome, he recovers his composure, and meets his fate like a man and a soldier.

In depicting this character the writer has shown no imaginary figure, but a living man. It is quite possible to perform heroic deeds, to risk one's life in a great cause without hesitation, and yet to be in sober moments afraid of Death. It is far easier to meet Death in the inebriation of passion than to face him with a tranquil mind. We cling to Life with every fibre of our being . . . always and everywhere Life defends itself against Death, exerting every force to avert it. This is as true of the worm trodden underfoot as it is of man. Nature shrinks from Death. Instinct teaches her to fear it.

Men die in many ways and under varied circumstances, but there are few spared that moment of anguished comprehension when aware that Death is at hand. The body, while there is strength in it, resists; often the soul revolts, loath to leave the known for the unknown country. This revolt and this struggle are most apparent in those who have no firm belief in Life beyond the grave.

But any one of us is apt to go through such a struggle, and often it is more terrifying than Death itself. We must remember that even if we have faithfully endeavoured to live as God desires us to, if we have obeyed His commandments, fulfilled His laws, and are willing to accept Death from His fatherly hands, the arch-enemy,

just because of these things, has not yielded his power. He would succeed in making us despair on the very brink of Eternity were it not for the grace of God.

Let us recollect that storm, lightning, earthquake preceded God's revelation of Himself to the prophets. We must submit. In the Garden of Gethsemani our Saviour not only tasted the chalice of fear — He drained it to the dregs. Was there ever one so brave, so strong, so ready to face death as He was? Was there ever one so ready to sacrifice everything, so ready to suffer as our blessed Lord? Yet He trembled and was sorrowful, and as He lay on His knees He besought His heavenly Father to have mercy on Him. Yes, He groaned and wept, He struggled so that the blood started from every pore. He experienced to the full the agony of Death. He was our God, but at this moment, looking Death in the face, His human nature shook with anguish. Need we then be ashamed if fear and anguish overtake us in that dread hour? He has pointed the way out of the abyss of fear; it is submission to our heavenly Father's will and confidence in His mercy.

And on the Cross again, our Lord drank from the bitter chalice, partaking of it more deeply than we ever can, even to the point of feeling Himself forsaken by God; but He conquered Death by absolute self-surrender, commending His Spirit into His Father's hands.

He who accepts the will of God with his whole heart possesses a firm support in the most furious storms that may assail him. The waters of fear may sweep over him, but he will not be carried down into their depths. Freed of its thrall, his soul will victoriously rise on the wings of the Strong Angel, to the eternal heights.

When the agony comes upon us, dear Saviour, Thou wilt give us grace to cast our thoughts toward Thee in the lonely Garden of Gethsemani! If we remember the agony Thou didst endure, Thy tears, Thy bloody sweat, how small will all our sufferings appear!

THE VEILED FIGURE

A GREAT painter desired to paint Job, the man of patience, so sorely tried, so afflicted in mind and body, sitting among the ruins of his prosperity.

After much thought as to how he might give expression to the misery of this poor mortal, he felt that no outline of features could possibly portray his great anguish, and therefore he painted him veiled. In the picture we see a wide expanse of dreary desert, the glowing sky above, and in the foreground the vague outline of a human being, lying prostrate on the ground. The face cannot be seen, for in his misery the man has

hidden his affliction and his grief beneath the folds of his cloak, as if shrinking from the light of day, from the gaze of men.

No one can look upon this muffled form without a shudder; one feels, instinctively, the horrors concealed beneath that covering, dreading the sight that the prostrate figure would disclose were it to expose its countenance to view.

Have you ever entered a room where one you loved in Life lay motionless and pale in Death? Fain would you gaze once more on that dear face; you stretch out your hand to take the sheet away. But your hand falters, you shrink back, dread overpowers you, and you ask yourself whether the dear familiar features are there or whether Death has disfigured them.

Death's face is hidden, too — we are not to look upon him with our living eyes. We owe a debt of gratitude to our Father in heaven, that He has concealed the final hour from us until it comes upon us. Even in the pangs of our last illness most of us hope to recover. Death is the one great experience of Life that is ever veiled from us. Whatever have been our trials, they have taught us nothing of Death.

In vain do we attempt to learn aught from the dying, for as long as they can speak to us they are ignorant of Death; it is still the terrible, mysterious something, of which their souls know nothing. The nearer they draw to Death, the farther do they go from us. And when Death

has reached them — or they have reached him — and they should desire, by any chance, to turn back for even one single word, they cannot do it. They are so much occupied with Death and his solemnity that all our pleadings cannot touch them. They care nothing now for Life. Sometimes a swift change passes over the pale countenance, as if the departing soul witnessed some unexpected sight. Astonishment, fear, surprise, joy? How may we tell? Who can answer these questions?

The deceased knows the solution of the problem now, while we strive in vain to pierce the veil. He may have been dearest and nearest to us in the world, his heart was as an open book to us, but he will never betray the great secret of Death. He may have been our guide and counsellor, ever ready to show us the way, now he utters no word of warning or advice.

Sit down if you will, bring all the powers of your mind to bear on the question: "How shall I die?" You will find no answer. Death will not lift his veil . . . you must take him as he is, as the great unknown, never to be experienced or realized in Life.

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We thank Thee, Father, for Thy loving care in keeping from us the knowledge of the hour and the time of our death, decreeing that we should suffer the pangs of the last hour but once, and

not many times by anticipation. But we need Thy help to meet fitly Thy Angel when our Life is fading away. Let us have no unavailing regrets, no dread of what is to come, confident that as from Thee, O God, we received the breath of Life, Thou wilt now receive it from us, having mercy on our mortal weaknesses.

FAREWELL

FAREWELL! How much or how little that word can mean! Now and then uttered cheerfully, it is oftener tinged with the sadness of long parting.

Our Life is one continuous series of farewells; people and things, days and nights, joys and sorrows go in uninterrupted succession. Nothing remains with us permanently. Obligated to part with that which is dear to us, how sad our hearts, how affectionate the farewell. The home to which our hearts cling passionately! The friend who was the dear companion of our sorrows and joys! Life itself would seem less hard to lose than these, yet Death is the last, supreme, absolute farewell, embracing all that we hold dear on earth.

A dying man holds naught of his possessions in his nerveless grasp. Whether great or small, whether his heart clings to them or not, he must renounce them. "What hath pride profited us . . . or the boasting of riches?" Yet, even

without any undue attachment to these things, it is hard — so hard! — to bid farewell to the work to which has been devoted our waking and working hours. It may fail, perhaps, when the guiding hand is removed.

But a dying man gives up more than his ambitions and possessions. He gives up hobbies, associates, fellow-workers, all those who loved and honoured him, all who opposed him. The children he cherishes, who need his counsel for a few more years; the loyal wife, who now must tread the way of Life alone.

Is it not very sad? If we think of these things, letting our imagination ponder them, are they not enough to frighten us?

But what of those who have no hope, who claim that the farewell of Death is farewell for ever?

We go forth out of this Life, they say, completely dissolved; we shall never again look upon our dear ones. The light of the sun, vanished in Death, has vanished for ever, the beauties of nature gone for ever.

Poor unfortunates, they know not that these very things are proof positive of God's existence and of the existence of Eternity.

Let us say farewell to this tenement of clay; indeed, we who hope, let our souls abandon this body, the last thing the soul can call its own, the one thing most intimately connected with it, its convenient dwelling, the body which has supplied

it with the means of serving God, and been its companion through Life.

They have shared joys and sorrows. The soul has laboured and rested, toiled and struggled, suffered and rejoiced in the body. The soul has been the skilful teacher, always gathering fresh knowledge, new impressions. Their union was a true marriage, long-lasting and fruitful, but Death will cause their separation. The soul must abandon the body, and the body cannot live without the soul. It is an exquisite work of art, the masterpiece of marvellous wisdom, but the soul's departure gives this wonderful body up to destruction.

This consideration is, without doubt, the real root of the fear in the heart of man. We can bear to leave all, everything but this body, the only home the soul has known.

A strong faith, O God, will enable us to stand immovable in every storm. Our first prayer of the day, our last prayer at its ending, let it be: "Lord, I believe! I believe!"

THE STING OF DEATH

DEATH is the child of Sin, since, through Sin, Death came into the world.

But Sin, claiming alluring charms and promising exquisite enjoyment, hates this child. It

is ashamed of Death, as dissolution. It would gladly disown Death, for it is its boast that it is the joy and fulness and completeness of Life.

But Sin has never yet spoken the truth; all its beauty is a pretence, and when its false trappings are laid aside, it reveals its ugliness.

The Strong Angel, bearing Death in his tender hands — Death, the result of Sin, of rebellion against God — knows that the dissolution of body and soul is, in reality, the supreme moment for which Sin has been working during the lifetime of its victim. The moment of Death is the moment of ultimate decision. The helpmate of the devil, Sin secures the victims. It hides its cruelty as its vileness under a suave and smiling exterior. But beneath these are malice and hatred.

Where Sin has no entrance, Death is robbed of its terrors; where Sin reigns, Death is dreadful to encounter. "The sting of Death is Sin."

We fully realize this when present at the death of a little child, who is going to heaven in the white robe of innocence. Or at the death of a faithful soul, who lived his life mindful of the all-seeing eyes of God. The Strong Angel is very gentle with souls such as these.

But grievous is the death of the wicked.

Life is an alluring dream, ever varying, ever new. It allows little time for serious reflection. Now and then God's voice makes itself heard, and man pauses, surveying, by the light of God's grace, the path behind him and the way ahead.

He may take counsel then with his own soul. He may resolve that he will change this thing or that, but the world again pounces upon him, gayly, laughingly, promising boundless pleasure, a long life of joy, beauty, happiness. He is caught in the whirl. He fondly imagines the end far distant, no need to prepare for it now.

But suddenly the rosy clouds are dissipated. The end is seen fast approaching. Now, indeed, serious thoughts crowd in upon him. Life and its philosophy seem different when one looks backward. Much that seemed important now stands revealed in its insignificance. Much that seemed trivial now shows its importance. Where are the joys of the Life that is past? Faded blossoms by the wayside. Where are the sorrows that stung? Vanished. Where are our honours, our achievements? Impediments on our pathway, unreal fancies that obscure our vision of God's eternal day. And what is it that presses upon us from every side, that covers the road we have traversed, that crowds forth from hidden places, like hideous vermin, perplexing our poor souls with threatening leer?

Sins, multitudes of sins.

Some have always lingered in our memory, ready to rise up and accuse us; but in the days of our strength we have subdued them. Now they are upon us, helplessly we feel their fangs piercing our very vitals. Forgotten sins, but now how distinctly remembered! Once so harmless in ap-

pearance, now, putting away their bland masks, so obviously iniquitous. What reptiles, these, to fill the nooks and crannies of a man's mind, to crawl out in all their loathsomeness now, when he has not the strength to banish them or to fight them!

Oh, the appalling clearness of the Soul's Vision when Death is nigh! Oh, to be assured that we have rightly repented, rightly made reparation! Oh, to be certain we have not neglected the most important business of Life, to be certain that we can repair our omissions!

Thus moans the unhappy soul in its self-indulged body! Realizing now its frailty, its entanglement, the soul loses courage. To the claims of conscience and the tortures of memory are added ghastly fancies, horrible dreams. Whither is it going?

"The sting of Death is Sin." If there were no Sin, Death would have no terrors.

Who will support us in that last dread hour? Who will give us grace and courage? Only One, and He alone. "Thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. xv. 57.)

His Hand is outstretched to help and sustain. Let us throw ourselves upon His boundless mercy and humbly accept the terrors and agony of Death. It will be the final, the greatest, the saving penance.

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Alas, there are but few among us who at the end of Life can give their souls into the Strong Angel's keeping wearing the white robe of innocence. Many have stained that robe. But ah! we may weave a new robe from the remnants of the old on the wheel of repentance.

PECCATOR VIDEBIT!

THE one hundred and eleventh Psalm proclaims in joyous strains the happiness of the righteous. Beginning with the words, "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord," the royal poet describes his blissful state. But at the end he suddenly changes his tone, and gazing sternly at the sinner who thwarts God's designs, he threatens: "The wicked shall see and shall be angry, he shall gnash with his teeth and pine away; the desire of the wicked shall perish."

After the serene and joyful chant that precedes them, these words ring out like the blast of a trumpet. They come crashing like a thunderbolt. No other mortal has ever succeeded in giving such vivid expression to the death in despair as the Psalmist has done in these few words.

Peccator videbit — the wicked shall see, when he lies on his deathbed. He shall see the joy of the just, whom he despised; he shall see the folly in which his Life has been wasted; he shall see the heavy burden of guilt and the approaching

judgment. All is now terribly clear, for the world is passing. The naked truth stands before him, no longer can he close his eyes to it.

Et irascetur — he shall be angry. Yes, for his sight is now keen; he realizes his condition, and his evil will, which despised the sweet yoke of Christ, refuses now to submit. It holds him fast, a slave of Sin and Satan. Conversion would be humiliation, never will he humble himself. So he is angry with God, with his fate, with himself, with his own unhappy soul.

Dentibus fremet — he shall gnash his teeth. In his fury, refusing to listen to the urgent promptings of his sorrowful guardian angel, who sees the Great Messenger approaching with stern look, he bursts out into a fit of rage against his Maker; this rage gives way to fear, and the fear to despair, the unforgivable sin, which now thrusts its fangs into the shuddering soul and surrenders it to its doom.

Et tabescet — and he shall pine away. Rage and fear subside, as the waves spend themselves with impotent fury upon a rocky crag. Death now lays his hand on this worldling . . . and all is over.

Desiderium peccatorum peribit — the desire of the wicked shall perish. All that the sinner has striven to attain shall die with him. Those aims and ambitions, which should have been directed to God, the Source of Life, must remain for ever unsatisfied in the darkness of Death. This is the

end of his proud dreams, of his splendid activity, his great exertions.

Does any man really die thus? Assuredly he will, if he misuses the priceless gift of free will and turns away from God. There is no depth to which a human soul may not abandon itself, and its extremity is the death in despair.

There is a tradition concerning Julian the Apostate, relating that, when he lay dying upon the battlefield, he raised his hand toward heaven and exclaimed in impotent fury: "O Nazarene! Thou hast conquered!" And it is related of a famous but godless poet that on his deathbed a friend tried to console him, telling him of the mercy of God, assuring him that God would forgive his sins. With a sneer the reprobate replied: "Ah! yes — that is His business."

These are two examples of the depth the human soul can descend to — the depth of despair, the depth of mockery.

Grant God that we may keep such corruption far away from us.

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When that dread hour comes upon us and we know that the end is near, may no cloud darken our intellect or overshadow our hearts! We pray for ourselves, and we pray for all poor sinners. Grant them, O God, strength and courage to renounce the ways of evil and follow Thee, though it be at the eleventh hour.

THE CLOSED DOOR

AFTER the Great Angel takes the soul and carries it through the portals of Eternity, portals which only the soul dead to earthly Life may cross, he closes the door after him.

No mortal has ever caught a glimpse of what lies beyond the closed door. It is unexplored territory, and human knowledge can never penetrate there. The fate of the departed soul is altogether beyond the reach of human experience, contrary to the absurd claims of spiritism and occultism. Some favoured saints have in ecstasy given us pictures of the Life beyond the grave, and their utterances are vastly different from those of the would-be seers who profess to have knowledge of such things.

For an answer to the question: What becomes of the soul after Death? we must have recourse to Revelation. The reply given is: "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment." (Hebr. ix. 27.)

These words show clearly that there is no interval between Time and Eternity, between the end of our probation and the sentence. There is no interval of sleep, no unconsciousness of the soul, nor a transmigration, as some would teach, with the soul going through a series of growth or evolution. Immediately after the soul leaves the body it appears before the judgment seat of God.

The judgment! How stinging the word sounds to our ears. We desire tenderness and sympathy; we demand extenuation for our errors; we wish to be reconciled to God by His grace, but not to be judged by His justice. In this Life we enjoy many divine favours. God cares for us, cherishes us, allures us, guides us, helps us, all the while enduring our many frailties. He is, as it were, the gardener, the shepherd, the father of our souls. He is never weary of admonishing or pardoning. Thus He deals with us throughout Life, but at Death the time of grace is over. Then the time of retribution begins. Well for us, then, if we have corresponded with His designs, for He, the God of mercy, is also the God of justice.

When in Holy Scripture we read of the harvest, the reference is frequently to the General Judgment at the end of the world. Mankind must be judged collectively, but each man's soul must also face individual judgment, particular judgment, immediately after Death.

This is the reason why Death is so supremely important. It is the sentence of our destiny. Man has already decided. He is free to choose the aim and direction of his Life, and he himself is responsible for his choice. Death merely discloses the true condition of his soul. With Death the time of grace and merit is over. After Death the soul may, it is true, be purified, but there can be no conversion. Grace lost is grace lost for ever. The soul now can only be-

come perfect through suffering, through the prayers of the Church, or of those left behind in Life.

"A book was opened," says St. John, to bring vividly before our minds the precision and strict justice of our trial. This is the great book in which everything is recorded, from the beginning of our life to our last hour. All is to be weighed and judged, for everything in human existence is of importance, and the results of each action continue to affect ourselves and others.

Human judgment is guided by human observation — the hidden springs are not revealed to us. Man is imperfect, hence the imperfection of his judgments.

The Eternal Judge overlooks nothing. Everything is written in the great book of His omniscience. The Life of a man is not a fragmentary thing, but whole and entire, bound for one end, leading up to one result. In the light of divine truth all is laid open to view — and man contains in himself both the judgment and the sentence. God but reveals these to him. There is no need for long examination or consideration.

"A book was opened" — the soul itself is the great book, closed during Life not only from others, but also from one's self. Death opens it and the light of heaven shines upon its pages.

What then?

"He was silent."

The guest who presented himself at the feast

without a wedding garment had nothing to say when the King reproached him, asking: "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment?" Where God is judge, there can be no palliation, no excuses, no requests for pardon. The judgment is just because it is God's.

These thoughts make Death hard. How are we to face the great Judge before whom even the angels tremble? The judgment is just, because it is God's — yes, we acknowledge with fear this truth . . . but it should also fill us with consolation and confidence. God is just, not only because He is holy, but because He is filled with love and wisdom. He understands our frailty, He knows the creature whom He has made. The Apostle has indeed said: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebr. x. 31.) But there are two other passages in Holy Scripture which we may, for our comfort, compare with this saying, namely: "It is better that I should fall into the hands of the Lord (for His mercies are many), than into the hands of men" (2 Kings xxiv. 14), and "We shall fall into the hands of the Lord, and not into the hands of men, for according to His greatness, so also is His mercy" (Ecclus. ii. 22, 23).

"According to His greatness, so also is His mercy." These glorious words are like rays of light, piercing the darkness of the night; like stars shining in the firmament of heaven.

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When night comes, in which no man can work, may we be conscious of having made good use of the manifold graces bestowed upon us. Let it not be our fate to bemoan lost opportunities.

“IT IS I!”

THERE is a certain painting which represents a strange scene — it is the picture of Judas Iscariot standing before his Judge.

And his Judge is Jesus Christ, whom he has betrayed.

Jesus is seated, as devoid of all signs of His dignity as when He dwelt on earth. He is looking at Judas. His brow still bears the marks of the cruel thorns, His hands, resting on His knees, show the prints of the nails. Silent witnesses these, but oh, how eloquent!

But even these do not impart to the scene its severe impressiveness. The most impressive things are the eyes of Jesus — the calm and quiet eyes of a God. Before them Judas shrinks. He would flee but cannot, for he is bound in fetters of thorns. And so he must endure that gaze, which is searching his soul, laying bare its secret foulness.

And those eyes — the eyes of a God who was betrayed!

What do those quiet eyes say?

"Judas Iscariot, it is I. I, who brought thee out of nothing, to set thee upon My throne!

"I, who shared My bread with thee and treated thee as a friend.

"I, who endured thee with patience, though knowing the falseness of thy heart.

"I, who did not refuse thy kiss, when in thy purse thou heldest the coins of treason.

"I, who gave My Life for thee, that Life which thou didst sell for thirty pieces of silver.

"Judas, it is I.

"I know thy treachery and thy cowardice, and thy meanness and thy profound ingratitude.

"Thou art already judged. Thou hast condemned thyself."

So shall we stand one day before our Judge. So will those calm eyes search our very souls, and we shall look upon the brow that bears the marks of the thorns, upon the hands with the prints of the nails. And standing thus we shall suddenly remember the graces that we have disdained, the gifts we have wasted.

In giving us these graces and gifts our Saviour would draw us nearer and nearer to Him. But we rejected Him. We betrayed Him. We have been false, cowardly, mean, ungrateful. And now He is there to judge us. He rests those calm eyes upon us. What do we read in their silent gaze?

"It is I, O Soul. I, who have loved thee for all Eternity.

"I, who have delivered thee from thine iniquities and invited thee to My Table.

"I, who have borne thy frailties so often.

"I, whom thou hast known and yet despised.

"I, who in thy poorer brethren appealed to thy compassion and seldom found mercy.

"I know thee, O Soul. What sentence hast thou pronounced upon thyself?"

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Oh, let us pronounce our sentence now, ere the dread day dawns. Let us look, in imagination, at that gentle face and speak:

"O Lord, all that Thou hast said is true. My conscience beareth witness against myself.

"With humility and repentance I acknowledge my guilt. To judge myself would be to condemn me.

"It is for Thee to judge. Do Thou utter my sentence. I cast myself into the arms of Thy mercy, whence none shall tear me away. Not even Thou canst separate me from Thy merciful judgment, Lord, for according to Thy greatness is the boundless heaven of Thy mercy."

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"It is I, Lord . . . I, Thy poor unhappy creature. I, so full of misery and woe . . . but I love Thee, most blessed Lord, and my hope is in Thy great love for me."

AND THEN?

WHAT then? This question weighs heavily upon the departing soul. Death, the passing of the soul, the judgment — a flash of lighting in the darkness, revealing the Life of man as it has been, and as it is to be for ever!

And then? Earth will have vanished. Before the soul stretches the vast, immeasurable expanse of Eternity. But it cannot turn whither it will. A path is assigned to it, and it must walk thereon . . . gladly and joyfully, or slowly and wearily, or, perish the thought, despairingly, with heavy, hopeless tread.

It must go its way, this poor soul of ours . . . but whither does the way lead?

From the golden heights resound the songs of exultation, and in the rosy light of unending day appears a lofty gate. The air is sweet as the breath of spring, and the melodious rustle of angels' wings, the enchanting music of celestial choirs draws near. All is flooded with glorious light.

It is the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God. Is the soul destined to go thither?

Yonder in the dimness, lighted by a pale moon, are the faint outlines of a dreary land, the roads of which are rough and wearisome. The air is heavy with tears, the breeze laden with sighs. It is the abode of exiles, wandering far from their

Home, singing a mournful song, the expression of their passionate longing: "When shall I come and appear before the face of God? How long, O Lord, how long?"

A solitary star shines through the gray mist . . . the star of hope. How long will the soul be compelled to tarry in this land of exile, to stumble along its rough and weary ways, lifting many mournful sighs and prayers ere it reaches the haven of eternal beatitude?

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But, lo! there is still another road . . . so dark, so dismal, that one can scarcely discern it in the enshrouding gloom.

No pale moon shines there; no solitary star gives a ray of hope. It is the abode of darkness, the stronghold of the terrors of eternal corruption. A black gate guards its entrance. Sinister clouds hover above it, from the hidden depths beneath come crashes of thunder, portentous and terrifying.

O Soul, poor Soul, surely thou wilt not go thither? Surely, it cannot be thy chosen fate to enter there?

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These are fanciful imaginings . . . yet, do they not contain a germ of truth? If we try to imagine what happens after Death, we must resort to pictures — knowing that they do not represent

reality, yet they help us to understand, however faintly, what will happen when this Life is over.

We cannot pass the gulf until we die, nor can those once beyond it return to give us tidings. Could they come back they would be at a loss for words; we could not understand unless they showed us what they meant by metaphor and even then our comprehension would but faintly grasp their meaning.

These pictures rise before the departing soul and torture it when it asks the question: "Soon it will be over, and then?" There is no answer now. But this uncertainty of eternal joy or eternal condemnation must be accepted with humility as part of the penalty of Death.

We must not let the uncertainty crush us. Our trust in God's mercy must rise above our fear of His justice. Does not He Himself assure us that He desires not the Death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live? He would not break the bruised reed nor quench the burning flax.

If there is a spark of the heavenly fire alive in that soul after its departure, it will be saved, though a long time may elapse ere it will grow strong and perfect.

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What have we done, what are we doing that will bring us nearer that shining gate, nearer the Life Eternal and Thee, dear blessed Saviour?

What have we done, what are we doing, for which we will have to suffer, and abide perhaps for years, in the dim gray land of Purgatory? What are we doing, what have we done that will merit . . . hell?

BUT ONCE

EVERY art requires persistent practice. Genius, they say, is capacity for hard work. A great artist is born, not made, yet he has to perfect his talents by industry and indefatigable attention.

There is only one art which must be acquired without practice — the art of dying. It is the most important of all arts, and only those who die well attain perfection in it. Our whole Life is bestowed upon us that we may learn the art of dying well. But we cannot practise dying.

We *can*, however, prepare for it, and if we prepare rightly, our first and only performance in this great art will be a masterpiece. Indeed it *must* be that. If we fail, there is no remedy. Many a man, if he could die a second time, would be careful to die better. But once taken, this step admits of no retraction, and Eternity depends upon it.

The saying, "Man is the architect of his own future," applies to the end of Life more truly than to any other portion of it. There is comfort only in the knowledge that in this all-important

affair nothing is left to chance or to luck. All depends on God's grace and man's will. The former is in God's hand, the latter in our own.

Yet the words "but once" have a sound so strangely ominous! Contemplation at first terrifies. We think of it with something like anguish, and we hasten to put the thought away. A foolish thing to do. There is no use in banishing that which must occur to us again and again in the course of our days. Just as a wild beast, taken captive, fights against the chains that bind him, but after a while submits to his keepers, often even gains affection for them — so with the thought of Death. By thinking of it soberly, once in a while, we will at last be able to say: "But once! Thank God for that! I have to die but once, and then dying will be done for ever."

And since a man has to die "but once," he ought to be alert when Death approaches. He should not be taken by surprise. It is cruel to deceive the soul of a sick man, bidding it hope for Life, and thus depriving it of the only few, precious moments in which to lay its prayers and pleadings before the Throne of God. Yet we find shortsighted and silly people doing this, keeping the knowledge of the swiftly approaching Death from the sick man. It is depriving him of his most important rights, and one cannot do it without committing grievous sin. He may thus be given an hour or two of hope before the end, but does this justify the deception? Is thus any

benefit conferred on an immortal soul? Here it stands on the brink of Eternity — an Eternity for ever wretched or for ever happy — and the knowledge of his approaching fate is kept away from him — through mistaken kindness.

No Christian can be panic-stricken at hearing a truth that will mean, perhaps, his eternal salvation; if he be greatly alarmed, the very fact shows that he needed to be told, since he was so far from realizing his true condition.

Real charity does not hesitate when it comes to saving a soul. The dearer the soul, the more anxious we should be that it should willingly accept the last great sacrifice from the loving hands of God and make ready to face Him in judgment. The more loving and tender our hearts, the more they will feel the obligation of doing this. Love helps one to die well.

May those who truly love us with a Christian love be about us when we, too, must prepare for Death.

“ Preserve us from a sudden and unlooked-for Death! ”

THE MOMENT OF DEATH

DEATH is very old. We need not be surprised if his gait is slow. He is seldom in a hurry. The devil might rightly complain that

Death no longer seizes quickly; science has been enabled to do so much to prolong Life that now time is left for preparation where formerly none was granted.

When does Death take place? At what moment does the soul leave the body? Is a man really dead as soon as his heart stops beating and the breath ceases to issue from his lips? When did this man die? That Death has taken place is certain, because decomposition has set in. At what precise moment, however, did his soul separate from the body?

Formerly this was regarded an easy question, and the answer would be: "When the lungs are no longer inflated, when the heart has ceased beating, Death has occurred. Life is inseparably connected with these functions."

To-day we cannot speak so positively. It has been found possible to restore by artificial means the action of the heart. Life returns with the beating of its most vital organ, and with the pulsing of the blood it resumes its sway over the entire body, for Life had not yet been extinct. No art or science, however, can bring back the really dead. The nervous system is the first to fail, because the blood stops circulating as soon as the heart ceases to beat. After the lapse of two minutes it is dead. Speaking theoretically, therefore, possibility of revival continues for two minutes after the last heart-throb. Consequently during those two minutes the man is still alive. Some

activity remains until decay begins, and until then there is still a vital principle in the body.

But we know but *one* vital principle in man — and this is his soul.

We cannot carry an argument too far. Decomposition sets in before we can perceive it. We know that Death takes place gradually, the bonds between body and soul are not torn asunder in a moment, and herein we Catholics find great consolation. "Too late!" are almost always words of ominous meaning, but most fateful when we are forced to say them to the priest, hastily summoned to administer the Last Sacraments. The Church then requires, nevertheless, that absolution be given, and Extreme Unction be administered conditionally, as long as it is possible to assume that Life is not extinct. On this point we may listen to science. By prolonging the chance of salvation it has opened to us the door of comfort.

THE HIDDEN ABOMINATION

AS Job sat there in his misery, he thought of all that makes human destiny hard and bitter: the long and weary toil of Life, the agony of Death. After the many other gloomy pictures had presented themselves to his disconsolate mind, he beheld at last the one that filled him with most abhorrence — the decay of the dead body. He saw how it robs of comeliness and dignity that

which was once inexpressibly beautiful, indescribably noble. He reflected that this, too, would be *his* lot, and cried: "I have said to rottenness, thou art my father; to worms, my mother and my sister." (Job xvii. 14.)

When a man dies his body is carried away; it is lowered into the grave; the earth is heaped above him, and a cross or stone bearing an inscription set over him. Green grass and bright flowers cover and adorn the grave. We look at it with quiet sorrow, thinking of him who lies there in peaceful sleep.

Our thoughts rarely take us farther than that, and imagination is not allowed to picture the changes that are taking place. But the ancient pagans dreaded the decay after Death as one of the most terrible of fates, and therefore sought to preserve the body by means of embalming. Our modern pagans resort to cremation — a process rightly forbidden by the Church.

"When my body is laid to rest in Death, disturb not my sleep in the lap of the earth from which I was fashioned." This is the sentiment of a Christian soul, and it is the sentiment of the great master, Shakespeare, who caused to be engraved on his tombstone the exhortation:

"Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
To digg the dust enclosed here;
Bleste be the man who spares these stones
And curst be he that moves my bones."

No one has dared to violate the poet's grave; it is still untouched in Holy Trinity Church, in the quiet little town of Stratford-on-Avon, while in Westminster Abbey, where the English love to bury the dead whom they honour most highly, there is only a cenotaph of Shakespeare.

The fate that befalls our body should not give us cause for alarm. When the time comes, that same body shall rise in glory, join its beloved companion, the soul, and soar to regions of bliss eternal. Grant that this may be our lot! It will be the lot of those who walk justly before the Lord.

But there is another hidden abomination, more horrible than the thought of the body, given over to corruption. It is the spectacle of a dead soul. What of it that now its outer shell bears human resemblance, that its possessor walks the earth clothed in an attractive body? The hidden abomination! Oh, how our blessed Lord must turn away from such a sight as this!

A soul dead in sin may indeed call rottenness its father, as holy Job did for his body. And no imagination can picture anything fouler in the eyes of God's angels and His saints than the soul of a man who deliberately turns from good and seeks evil — the hidden abomination.

The horror of bodily corruption need not alarm us. Humbly accepting Death as the last penance laid upon us by the hand of God, let us accept it in its fulness. Let the Strong Angel complete his

work, and let us lie at the foot of the Cross, bedded in dust, as beseems a sinner in the presence of the majesty of God. We offer this last sacrifice, this humiliation of our bodies, in true sorrow for our sins. We will humble ourselves before our God, for above us the sun is rising.

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What greater duty can we have than to pray for the man or woman who carries in his or her body the hidden abomination of a dead soul? Lord, have mercy upon them!

CONSECRATION

*I am glad that I am going;
What a strange and sweet delight
Is thro' all my being flowing
When I know that, sure, to-night
I will pass from earth and meet Him,
Whom I loved thro' all the years,
Who will crown me when I greet Him,
And will kiss away my tears.*

—FATHER RYAN.

AFTERGLOW IN THE ALPS

Life's vesper bells are ringing
In the temple of my heart,
And yon sunset, sure, is singing
"Nunc Dimittis — Now depart!"

— FATHER RYAN.

MANY years ago I sojourned one summer in the Alps of Switzerland, and one evening I beheld from the summit of a mountain peak the marvellous beauty of the Alpine landscape at my feet. Beyond the deep gorge before me rose the mighty Jungfrau and the Mönch. They seemed quite close to me as they stood resplendent in their ermine robes of everlasting snow, with sparkling crowns upon their proud and lofty brows.

But soon the sun was sinking below the horizon. What a sudden change! The radiance faded, giving place to a strange sense of chill; the glaciers lost their jewelled glitter and became gray, while from every cleft sprang up shadows, and the jagged points of rock towered gloomily heavenward. The beauty of these mountains faded just as the beauty of a lovely face fades in Death. No better similitude could be imagined.

It was such a change as passes over the countenance of the dead.

But there, very suddenly, the high peaks again sparkled with light! They glowed with a rosy light that penetrated even to the valleys — soft, at first, as the flush of dawn, but growing in intensity until the landscape gleamed with indescribable splendour. The mountains awoke to a new and wonderful Life. The afterglow of the setting sun was more wonderful than even the radiance of noontime.

Death is a sunset. Light and lustre depart from the countenance as the limbs grow stiff and cold. Loved features assume a sombre dignity that is awe-inspiring. Our hearts realize with a sharp pang that this is Death, that this is separation, that the one so dearly loved has passed from us so completely that even the outlines of his face are strangely unfamiliar.

But sometimes this is followed by an afterglow; the rigidity gradually passes, the hard lines are softened; a peaceful expression lights up the beloved features, the reflection of light eternal. Nor is it a mere relaxation of the rigidity of Death, but rather a beauty heretofore unknown — a beauty expressive of calm repose, of inexpressible peace.

Then wouldst thou look upon my quiet face,
Before they laid me in my resting place,
And deemed that death had made it almost fair.

— RIDER HAGGARD.

What causes this change? We do not say that it happens always, but it does happen very, very often. Does the soul, like the setting sun, cast a last ray, shedding sweet light upon the body that has been its faithful servant? Has the soul, at the moment of departure, cast one all-embracing glance forward, into a happiness so great that even this brief glance suffices to leave the glow of eternal bliss upon the mortal frame?

The soul is in Life ever striving to fashion the countenance to its own likeness, to make it its mirror. It meets with much opposition. Death removes the opposition; hence this change may be likened to a ray passing through Death's portal, a greeting from Eternity. It may be a faint hint of the transfiguration awaiting our bodies, a fleeting suggestion of what is in store for us.

We shall never solve the mystery, but when it appears, it is a welcome sight, illuminating the darkness of Death.

AN OLD MASTER

IN my wanderings, some years since, I came to Kolmar, a quiet town in Alsace, where they show the paintings of Matthias Grünewald, in what was formerly a Dominican monastery, but is now a museum. These pictures are great masterpieces of art. They have retained, for cen-

turies, their brilliant colouring and are as fresh to-day as when the master's hand finished them.

One of the pictures represents the Crucifixion. It is a picture that fills the heart with terror; the impression that it makes is overpowering, for here we see in very truth the Man of Sorrows — a worm and not a human being. There is no beauty in the pitiable figure. The drooping head is swollen, the fingers are convulsed; the whole body is torn and mangled. The beams of the Cross are sagging under the weight of such frightful pain and agony.

And as we turn aside our gaze, unable to bear the sight of this harrowing figure, we perceive to the side of the Cross the form of St. John the Baptist, who points to the Crucified and says: "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world." Thus we are forced to consider again the suffering of our Saviour.

There is also the Mother of Sorrows, supported by the arm of the beloved disciple; beneath her white veil her face looks like one on the point of death. At the foot of the Cross kneels Mary Magdalen, her hands raised up to the Master. Every detail in the picture brings us back to that figure on the Cross, though it is so appalling, so distressing, so frightful to contemplate. There seem to issue from that picture veritable waters of agony. The surroundings of the Cross are in darkness. On the horizon only a faint glimmer of light is visible.

Ah, what a death is this! We can easily understand that those lips drank the chalice of suffering down to the very dregs; we can hear the cry: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!" On those suffering shoulders were placed the sins of a whole iniquitous world. No soul, no matter how great its affliction, but may come here and, beholding this piteous affliction, forget its own. No sinner, no matter how great the guilt, but may feel that his sin will be forgiven, if he repents, burned up in this furnace of torment. No despairing heart can stand and look upon its God in His agony and not fall prostrated at His feet and weep bitter tears.

When we think of our Lord's wisdom and sanctity and miraculous powers, as recorded in the Gospel, we are impelled to exclaim rapturously: "Ah, He was indeed more than man! He is God's only-begotten Son!" And here, face to face with this intense suffering, we bow our head and with deep emotion again cry out: "Indeed, indeed, He is more than man! No human being could penetrate so far into the depths of agony. One who could endure this must have it in His power to reopen all the closed springs of Life. One who died such a death must have robbed death for ever of its worst sting."

As the first dreadful shock of this painting is over these thoughts follow. Compassion dries our tears. We find confidence and consolation. We shall fear Death no longer. Since our Sav-

your endured this terrible Death for us, what torture can equal His? Thou, O Lord, hast triumphed over Death!

The same artist depicts also the triumph, painting it with colours that seem steeped in sunlight. In the Resurrection our Lord, radiant and glorious, comes forth out of the grave, the very embodiment of Life. The guards lie prostrate on the ground — types of the hostile forces He has overcome. He lifts the hands that show the red scars of the nails; His face is so radiant that it is scarcely distinguishable. The Man of Sorrows is the King of Glory, who has conquered Death.

But it is before the picture of the Crucified we linger!

May the Cross be in our hands when we lie upon our deathbeds. May the last ebbing gleam of vision shine from our eyes upon it. May we carry it with us as a beaconlight. May our souls bear the imprint of the Cross, and through the Cross we shall obtain glory.

TRANSFORMATION

WE read in Holy Scripture that “by sin Death entered into this world.” It is from sin that Death takes the power to daunt humanity. “The sting of Death is Sin.” As we remarked in a previous chapter, “Satan, the

enemy of our souls, loves Death." He loves it because it is the fruit of sin. All life is abhorrent to him. Gladly would he keep us out of heaven and rob us of our heavenly reward. He can do this only by sin, and sin is only consummated by Death. By the death of the sinner Satan can carry out his designs, for then only is the soul delivered unto everlasting destruction.

But there came One whose touch transformed this world. Wherever He went Life became brighter and holier. He ennobled labour by toiling with His own divine hands; He sanctified innocent enjoyment by changing water into wine at the marriage feast. He consecrated suffering by His bitter Passion, by His Cross, as the tree of Moses made sweet the bitter waters of Mara. Finally, Death was made to feel the influence of His love, and He imparted to it a sacred dignity. Death, respecting none other, knelt with averted face before the Lord, waiting until summoned. And when at last He bowed His head, saying those fateful words, *Consummatum est*, only then did Death approach, holding out his arms to receive this royal Victim.

But Christ our Lord, ennobled Death by giving him the kiss of peace, and blessed peace has illumined the face of the Strong Angel ever since. The messenger of dread has become a messenger of joy.

It still remained his duty to take toll of humanity, but his terrors are mitigated, for above him

shines the star of hope. Thenceforth punishment was to be atonement, with the power to reconcile, to purify, and to make perfect. There is bitterness in his cup, but the bitterness is a remedy, and whenever the Cross is near, Death has ceased to be under the influence of Satan. Unless a soul wilfully withdraws itself from the grace of God, the shadow of the Cross has it in its keeping.

Death received its consecration from our dying Saviour, so that the soul, united in faith and love with its Redeemer, derives at Death strength and benediction from His suffering on the Cross. The suffering and death of an innocent child is not without its purpose. Just as the children of Bethlehem unwittingly served our Lord and won the palm of martyrdom, so every child that dies helps to bear His Cross, and from that Cross receives its share of blessing.

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Let us take our place at the foot of Thy Cross and behold the pain, the sorrow, the frightful anguish. These things Thou didst suffer for us. O Lord, teach us to suffer and endure for Thee!

THE EASTER GIFT

WHEN it was late that same day, the first of the week, and the doors were shut where the disciples were gathered together for

fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said: Peace be to you . . . He said, therefore, to them again, Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you. When He had said this, He breathed on them, and He said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." (St. John xx. 19, 23.)

It is not without significance that our Lord instituted the Sacrament of Penance on Easter day. After His Resurrection He passed through those closed doors and, standing in the midst of His awestruck disciples, greeted them with the words: "Peace be with you!"

This salutation was not merely a gracious wish. It was a favour, it conveyed the peace that our Saviour had won through the atonement upon the Cross, and the disciples were empowered to give this peace to others by giving absolution from sin. This is why our Lord breathed on them and said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

Thus the Sacrament of Penance was an Easter gift bestowed by Christ upon His Church, a gift of peace and joy. And how faithfully has the Church defended this precious treasure!

How many the sinners who have found comfort and peace in this great Sacrament! They cast from them a burden which weighs like a mountain upon

their consciences. They kneel before the tribunal of mercy and make open confession of their sins and failings and grievous crimes. And the Good Shepherd, going forth into the wilderness in search of His lost sheep, as it were, bends over the sinner in pity, and at the words *Ego te absolvo*, lifts him on His shoulders, to carry him back to the fold. Thus the redeeming love of our Saviour continues to help us, and any day may bestow this Easter gift upon the sinner who opens his heart to receive it.

Ego te absolvo — I absolve thee! Wondrous words, bringing release and joy, removing our fetters and giving us fresh Life. Our Lord permits human lips to utter a sentence that no angel would dare pronounce, but He is Himself the speaker, and His power abides in the words. Some of us may be tempted to regard as an annoying duty that which is really a priceless boon. But when our last hour approaches and all human consolation proves vain; when the tender speech of friends and the soothing utterances of devoted caretakers have no power to comfort us; when, perhaps, our conscience raises its voice in accusation and the evil one strives to bewilder and distress us, then, indeed, like a ray of sunlight falling into a dark place and dispelling all its shadows, come the words: *Ego te absolvo*.

All other voices are silenced. The soul drinks in the comfort as a parched flower drinks in the dew.

Ego te absolvo. These words remove the sting of Death and cast it far away.

Ego te absolvo. These words lift the soul above all its vain imaginings — aye, from the very dust, and restore to it the radiant light of peace.

Ego te absolvo. These words reach even to the gate of heaven, and peace and joy float down upon the dying, like the music of the bells at Easter tide.

Trusting in Thy divine Providence, O God, permit not that we leave this world without hearing, before we go, from the lips of Thine own priest, the blessed words: I absolve thee!

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

THE promise of our Lord to be with us all days has been abundantly fulfilled. He left us His trust and His grace; He gives us His daily, nay, hourly assistance; He is with us in the sense of being everywhere present. But His divine Heart, overflowing with love, desired to be in our very midst. God never retracts His word; having once given us Himself by taking our human nature, He was unwilling to leave us. He felt that even though His human body was to ascend to heaven, He could not withdraw His presence from His people on earth. So His wisdom devised a dwelling for His love in the grand

mystery of the altar. The altar is at once Bethlehem and Golgotha, and the tabernacle is Nazareth, where the Son of God, in the form of bread, dwells as really, though even more hidden, than when He lived at Nazareth in Galilee.

In the Holy Eucharist are centred the strength and wealth of the Catholic faith. From thence the Church derives its ever-vigorous life, as from a miraculous fountain, and through the Holy Eucharist each of us receives help in every time of need, especially at the last, the all-important hour. When our feet are too weak to carry us to the church, our Lord in lowly guise, unheralded, comes to visit us, His poor servants. The faithful may adorn the sickroom, the tapers gleam upon the little altar or table and in the hands of those who meet the priest on the threshold. But after all, how weak, how faint, how futile all this seems when one considers what God is and what we are — His dignity is so great that with all the love and reverence we can show Him we seem empty handed.

Faith penetrates all veils. The longing heart is throbbing in anticipation of the Lord's coming. The priest pauses on the threshold, saying: "Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell therein!" Peace claims possession, for the Prince of Peace is entering. Everything that might disturb peace is banished by His presence. Anxiety, struggles, fears . . . all take their flight. He not only comes to the house and sickroom, He

not only stands close to His dying servant, nay, more than this, He Himself enters that poor suffering heart. The priest gives to the sick man the Bread of heaven, saying: "Receive, brother, the Viaticum of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He may preserve thee from the malignant enemy and bring thee to Life Everlasting."

At these words a light breaks through the darkness of Death. The dying are lifted above the slough of despond. They need not fear, for they will have a Companion on the way, and no road can be too long or too dreary when so accompanied. They realize the truth of the Psalmist's exultant cry: "Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of Death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me!"

We are told that man is alone in Death, when admitted through that door to which none other may come except he die. There is truth in this statement in as far as human beings are concerned. But God can enter into the soul. His sweet indwelling presence, filling its innermost depths with light, strength, and consolation, removes the terrible loneliness of Death. When Life embraces and uplifts the soul in its powerful arms, Death loses all significance. He but destroys the tabernacle of the body, that the gates of our Father's house on high may open. He tears down the wall of partition, the only thing that stands in the way of perfect self-surrender and union with God.

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What fear can a soul entertain that sets forth on its last journey in the fragrance of God's presence? From the hidden God it goes forth to the God revealed.

THE LAST EQUIPMENT

THE Life of man is a warfare which continues until the hour of his Death. And even this hour is not free from assault. It is at this very moment that he must summon all his forces for the most decisive, and perhaps the hardest, conflict of all. The bodily strength fails and the soul, too, is restrained in her faculties. The enemy is not slow to perceive his advantage. In this last battle he has, as allies, bodily weakness, mental discouragement, and morbid imagination. Everything combines to drag the soul away from the thought of heaven and plunge it into an abyss of despair.

When a child is baptized he is anointed and equipped for the battle of Life. At his Confirmation the Holy Ghost imparts light, strength, and courage, so that he may fight bravely in the Lord's army. When he comes to die he needs fresh defences to protect him in his weakness, for now there is no question of advancing to an attack. He is not going forth to Life, but to Death. At Confirmation the oil is mixed with balm, the fragrance of which suggests the merits of activity. But a dying Christian is anointed with oil only,

for now he has only to suffer and endure. The battle is ended. He is to triumph, not by ability to attack, but by steadfastness. His Death is to be the crown which will repay for all.

In youth, with light heart he leaped into the struggle that occupies the Life of every individual and the whole history of our race. He has not always been victorious. Many defeats have diminished his strength. Now comes the last encounter. The Church, like a loving Mother, draws near to dress his wounds; she anoints his body, which sin has scathed. The body bears traces of weakness, of guilt, of defects; but when the Church is finished, Death may approach. The soul is armed.

The chief object of Extreme Unction is to secure a happy Death, a good ending to Life. It has another virtue. It has the power, under the Providence of God, and if He so wills, to prolong Life, to restore bodily health. But primarily it is the soul's remedy, a defence against Death, removing the curse attaching to it. It sanctifies Death, bringing it into relation with our Saviour's Passion, so that Death, the offspring of sin, becomes the promoter of our salvation. Death the conqueror becomes Death the conquered, the herald of Eternal Life. The Sacrament raises the soul from its weakness and discouragement, protects it in the special temptations that assail it, imparts consolation in suffering and confidence in God.

Often a man lies stricken and helpless, dying perhaps, unable to do anything toward securing his salvation. He cannot move, he cannot open his lips. Extreme Unction takes the place here of the Sacrament of Penance, which requires a more active coöperation from the recipient; and if there is penitent disposition on the part of the sick man, even grievous sin is blotted out.

At the beginning of Life the unconscious soul was endowed with God's grace through baptism, and in the same way, at the close of Life, God's grace is ready to accomplish the merciful task of saving the soul. What riches has not our Lord conferred upon us, especially at the very moment when our poverty is greatest!

Our hearts are filled with gratitude when we consider these mercies, but a thought arises: What becomes of a poor sinner who dies suddenly, and is thus deprived of the happiness of receiving the Last Sacraments? It is terrible to think that he may be lost for ever just because the priest arrives a few minutes too late.

There is no limitation to the mercy of God . . . and the most wretched sinner can find refuge therein if his heart is truly penitent. One can never know the last conscious thought of a man; a heartfelt, contrite prayer may go up to the throne of God, imploring mercy, even though we, looking on, see only a white rigid countenance.

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When we consider how God has hedged us about with graces, from childhood to old age, we cannot sufficiently admire His limitless goodness to us. How grateful we should be, how indifferent we are!

OUR MOTHER'S FAREWELL

IN the sublime prayers of her liturgy the Church possesses a priceless treasure. Inexhaustible beauties are contained in the missal, the ritual, and the breviary, enough to satisfy all the needs of our religious life and the cravings of a soul anxious to serve God. In these prayers and hymns the Church, the Mother of all the faithful and the Spouse of our divine Lord, expresses her innermost feelings. Many of the prayers and hymns are extremely ancient, yet they never lose their vigour and, like Holy Scripture, are ever new, ever youthful. They are characterized by simplicity and force, and they suggest dignity and composure even in their most impassioned requests.

Underlying this stately and incisive language, however, is a wonderful depth of meaning. They are as natural as if they had been developed out of daily needs, and yet they are perfect masterpieces of lofty poetry. Each little Collect is a gem of construction, lucidity, and of terse expression. To this rich treasury the Church has recourse when she wishes to give the dying the aid

of her intercession. The *Commendatio animae* is a wellspring of comfort and consolation. The priest addresses the departing soul, to whom he suggests comforting thoughts, then he invokes the assistance of angels and saints, finally his prayers seem almost to storm the gates of heaven, as he reminds almighty God of all that He, in His boundless mercy, has done for the children of this world. The dying man is invited to cast, with humility and contrition, one more glance at his past life, at the follies of his youth, and to implore God not to be mindful of his transgressions.

Then the Church, turning upon the evil one, who lies in wait for the dying penitent, hurls at him the mighty words of God. Again, in rapture, she strikes the higher note and sings of the heavenly Jerusalem and the face of Jesus Christ our Lord, as if desirous of drawing heaven down to earth by force. We may speak to God in our own words, but speech often fails us and we would fain say much for which we can find no expression. Who will loose our tongues and give wings to our souls? What better speech can we find than that of the Church for the dying? It will not be strange upon our lips nor fall upon deaf ears. It expresses fully and clearly all what we have asked for, prayed for, longed for, during our whole lives.

When our last hour comes, God grant it may come in peace. God grant that the accents of the *Commendatio animae* fall clearly on our ears, so

that our poor weak souls may follow them, rejoicing, making them the expression of our last effort, the outpourings of our love. Let us go into Eternity to the sound of these prayers, which will be the farewell of our Mother, the Church. Then, when Death has accomplished his work, the concluding petitions will follow us into the next world, like a guiding ray of light, a strong, sustaining hand, bearing up the arms of the blessed Messenger of Peace, who is helping us to fulfil our destiny.

“Come to his assistance, all ye saints of God; meet him, all ye angels of God; receive his soul and present it now before its Lord. May Jesus Christ receive him, and the angels conduct him to his place of rest; may they receive his soul, and present it now before his Lord.”

When that great moment arrives, what shall I carry in my hands to Thee, O Lord? A pure heart — alas, our hearts have listened to the promptings of sin. A clean life — often have we deviated from the straight path.

Alas, then, what have we to bring to Thee, the greatest King of all? Cleansed in the waters of repentance we may present to the heavenly Father the gift of His own Son — the Precious Body and Blood offered upon Mount Calvary.

Let this great gift prove acceptable to Thee! Look not upon the unworthiness of him who asks Thee to accept it!

THE EVENING SACRIFICE

AMONG the great men of the Old Testament, Moses stands out with almost superhuman majesty. He was the mighty leader of his nation, the friend and servant of God. It was to him that the Lord spoke — not in signs, but in words, and his face shone with the reflection of divine splendour.

The death of Moses was as wonderful as his life, for he died not of malady, nor of old age. Although attaining the ripe maturity of one hundred and twenty years, he was still in full health and vigour, and Death had no power over him until God ordered his departure. When that time had arrived, He told Moses to ascend Mount Nebo, so as to behold the Promised Land from afar . . . and then to die. Accordingly the powerful old man ascended the summit of the mountain, whence God deigned to show him the land flowing with milk and honey, and having seen it, Moses passed away in undiminished strength. For, as we read in Holy Scripture, “his eyes were not dimmed, nor were his teeth moved.” He died because God bade him die, not because Death triumphed over him; he died in obedience, voluntarily surrendering his soul.

This was a wonderful passing. The Master called His servant, who arose and, casting aside the fetters of the body, which God Himself had loosened, went forth to meet his Lord. Moses

offered his Life as an evening sacrifice, bringing to a worthy and holy close a long day of faithful labour.

Our Saviour's passing was vastly more wonderful. He, who had the power to lay down His Life and take it up again, died on the Cross because it was His own will. He testified to the voluntary nature of His sacrifice by crying with a loud voice: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit!" Such a passing was not the triumph of Death. It was an act performed with all freedom and strength. Our Saviour died because it was His will to die. Moses died because God called him. So, when God calls us, we also shall die.

Now, though we, the creatures of earth, cannot avoid this obligation, we can overcome its bitterness. Submission to God's will — that is the first and most necessary disposition. There is no terror in such an end as that. But one may go a step further than patient submission. One may make a voluntary surrender. That is, he need not fold his hands and passively wait, but he can raise them up to do the will of God as soon as it is recognized. The patient man yields his soul at God's demand; the strong man, making a free-will offering of his soul, would fain present it and place it in the hands of the Father from whom he has received it. In this way he is a priest offering his life, his soul, his whole being,

as upon an altar. This is how St. Paul died, who had long desired to be dissolved and be with Christ. The saints died thus — and of their death we are told in Holy Scripture that it is precious in the sight of God, being perfectly united with the death of our Saviour.

This voluntary passing, this evening sacrifice, has naught in common with Death such as we generally know it. One can imagine the Strong Angel, his smile lighting up the gloom, waiting with joy for the soul who offered such sacrifice.

What little can we do in return for Thee, O Lord? So very little, but deign to accept it: the humble submission to our own death, the willing acceptance of whatever sorrow may come with it, anguish of mind, physical pain.

THE FEAST OF ST. PETER IN CHAINS

IN spite of God's mercy and grace, in spite of all the consolation offered by the Church to the dying, in spite of all our good will, we are still poor, miserable sinners. Out of the depths rises the cry: "If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall endure it?" We must be pure as angels to enter into the enjoyment of our Lord. In some chosen souls God's likeness shines forth clear and spotless, but most of us must pass

through the cleansing fires. The day of action over, the soul must wait, fettered and helpless, until it is purified from all stain.

Yet even in Purgatory there is a day of joy — a festival of light, like the brightness of a glad June morning falling into the gloom of a dungeon. St. Peter lay in prison, behind bolt and bar, with heavy fetters on his hands and feet and guarded by four soldiers. He was as helpless as a poor, abandoned soul. But the Christians in Jerusalem prayed incessantly, nor did they cease until their intercession obtained his deliverance. An angel of God woke him. The chains fell from his hands, the iron gates sprang open, and guided by the angel, the apostle went forth to liberty unhindered.

So after our Death, and bound in the fetters forged by our own earthly frailty, lying weak and helpless like St. Peter in his dungeon, we will not be forgotten nor forsaken. For many there will be, loyal souls, to remember us in their prayers. And even if we are alone and lonely, as a leaf tossed by the wind, the Church is still our Mother, constant in prayer for those of her children who are imprisoned in purgatorial pain, and her intercession is not in vain. When, heavy with sorrow, we lie, as it were, in unhappy slumber, a light will shine upon us in the darkness and God's holy angel will stand by our side. We may think that we are dreaming, as St. Peter did in his prison, so unexpectedly will that glorious liberation come.

But it will be no dream. The time of release is at hand and, free from all fetters, we will joyfully shake off our sorrows, even as the lark shakes the dewdrops from his wings before he soars aloft in the golden light of morning.

There is one sacred bond which Death cannot sever — the bond of the Communion of Saints in Christ. It bridges over the chasm and enables love to pass beyond the grave, bearing in her gentle hands the alms of prayer. Love cannot be denied. It penetrates even to the darkest corner of Purgatory — an angel of God, who comes to release the soul in chains, as the angel came to release St. Peter.

How beautiful a thing is love like this, which has power to follow us and console us even after Death. The man or woman who finds such faithful love is blest indeed.

Wilt pray for me?

I plead with thee,

Sometimes just fold my name

In beautiful "Hail Marys" !

And you give me more

Than all the world besides.

It praises poets for the well-sung lay;

But ah! it hath forgotten how to pray.

It brings to brows of Poets crowns of Pride;

Some win such crowns and wear;

Give me, instead, a simple little prayer.

—FATHER RYAN.

LIFE

*Out of the shadows of sadness,
Into the sunshine of gladness,
 Into the light of the blest;
Out of a land very dreary,
 Into the rapture of rest.*

*· · · ·
Into a joy-land above us,
Where there's a Father to love us —
 Into our home — "Sweet Home."*

— FATHER RYAN.

THE CONQUEROR

WINTER has laid his hand upon the green earth and checked all sign of Life. The grass is dry and colourless, the branches break under the pressure of their icy coating, the brook, once babbling merrily over the pebbles, has ceased to flow.

Yet Life is not extinct. It lies hidden beneath the dry grass, in every root, in every vine. All nature will revive just as soon as the warmth of the sun will again assert itself. The grass will spring up, the roots will be stirred, the sap will rise, the buds swell . . . all will acknowledge the power of Life, disdaining the touch of winter, which, like Death, had held them in thrall. In ancient, yet ever new delight, the earth will again smile joyously, cheerfully, fruitfully.

There is an incessant conflict raging between Life and Death — a conflict that engages all creation. The tide of Life, flowing from an inexhaustible source, cannot be arrested, even though countless forces league themselves against it. Life is so infinitely rich that it showers its seed abroad most lavishly, heedless whether it grow or perish. Never losing courage, it pays no attention to the forces that would destroy it.

Everywhere the sacred fire burns, and Life is so fiercely strong that it can surmount all obstacles.

Yet it has no mean opponents, and so the strife goes on from day to day, in things great and small, in the history of nations as in the drop of water. Everywhere there is the struggle between Life and Death, between growth and decay, between victory and defeat. All seem to be inextricably bound together. And no man can tell how long the battle has been raging, how long it will continue.

Which is to conquer in the end — Life or Death?

Will the bright, warm, cheerful tide ebb away? Will the last drop be absorbed in barrenness? Will darkness take possession of this glorious earth and unbroken silence hold sway among the ruins of living things?

Life is so beautiful, so gay, so lovable — the little flower modestly unfolding its exquisite petals, the playful kitten rolling on the earth in the sunshine. Life is so sweet, so wonderful. Wonderful in the powerful animal that serves us, so strongly built and so agile; wonderful in the shining eyes of a child and the quaint eagerness of his face when he begins to speak and to ask questions. Life is like true gold in the free activity of man, in the labours of his intellect; like a flower exhaling sweet fragrance in the gentleness of a true woman. Life is the canticle of creation, it rises with sonorous melody to the throne of God. Life

proceeds from God, a ray of His light, the breath of His mouth, inspired by His might.

How, then, can Life ever be overcome, when its opponent, Death, is the offspring of sin, and as an unbidden guest has forced his way into the sanctuary of God's universe? It is foreordained that Death shall be overcome, compelled to lay down his cruel weapons, to perish and be seen no more, his memory becoming, as it were, a horrible legend, that once dimmed with its shadow the brightness of the eternal sun.

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Since unreasoning nature struggles for Life and resists Death, how much more so does man? It is a struggle which never ends until the very last moment. How carefully man must live in order to preserve Life, even in the natural order. And in the spiritual order, what greater precautions must be taken!

THE TREE OF LIFE

THE Tree of Life stood in Paradise, its fruit the source of vigour and perpetual youth. Adam's fall forced him to leave Paradise, and against its entrance God placed on guard an angel with a flaming sword, lest man should return and, eating of the Tree of Life, be rendered immortal.

Adam was now condemned to Death; the Tree of Life fashioned by our Creator had vanished. But our Lord to manifest His mercy to the fallen

race, planted another Tree of Life, the Cross, whereon He made expiation for the sins of the world and vanquished for ever the power of Death which Adam had brought upon his offspring. Though we are redeemed, we still have to do penance and endure Death. But Death in the end is forced to deliver his spoils to Christ, who rose triumphant from the grave.

That is the meaning of the cross upon the last resting-places of those we love. It is a token of our faith in our Redeemer, of our hope that we, too, shall rise again, victorious over Death. There can be no fairer ornament above the grave of a Christian, none more expressive. Flowers may be planted by loving hands, but flowers, fading so quickly, do not express our faith. Naught but the cross is fitting. There it stands, the Tree of Life.

We have lifted our eyes to the Cross and have seen Thy suffering! Let us view the Cross also in the light of Thy glorious Resurrection. Let us rejoice with Thee, dear Lord, in Thy great victory!

ST. PAUL'S SONG OF TRIUMPH

WHEN St. Paul preached in the Areopagus of Athens of the eternal God, in words displaying his holiness and learning, he found an attentive audience. But when he alluded to the

resurrection of the dead, his listeners drew away from him, dismayed. "We will hear thee again concerning this matter," they said, so repugnant was the idea of resurrection of the dead to the Athenian mind. In spite of all its philosophical training, it was held fast in the bonds of sensuality.

In Corinth, the second city of Greece, rivalling Athens in wealth and magnificence, in art and science, as in luxury and love of pleasure, St. Paul was forced to reprove some of his own converts for denying the resurrection of the dead. It was on this occasion that the apostle, with all the force of his priestly dignity and his divinely inspired knowledge, proclaimed that lofty doctrine that is almost above human comprehension. His words are like a magnificent poem. He begins with the foundation upon which the Resurrection rests, pointing out that the resurrection of the dead is not only a possibility, but reality, since the Resurrection of Christ is an actual fact, upon which all our faith and hope depend. If He rose from the dead, so must we, because we belong to Him, are part of Him. Just as, by reason of our descent from Adam, we are liable to Death, so, by reason of our union with Christ, we have the guarantee of our resurrection. Our Lord has established His kingdom to the overthrow of all His adversaries. "He must reign until He hath put all His enemies under His feet . . . and Death shall be destroyed the last."

If this be not so, all our works and sufferings are in vain. Death tears apart those things that belong essentially to one another, and if he were invincible, what assurance would we have of Life Eternal?

“But, some man will say, how do the dead rise again?” Thus asks St. Paul, and he answers his own question. “Senseless man, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die first. And that, when thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be; but bare grain, as of wheat, or of some of the seed. But God giveth it a body as He will: and to every seed its proper body.”

And concluding, looking up to heaven, his words strike a high note. The earth produces the works of God, but how far more glorious are the stars above, the celestial bodies in the heavens.

“One is the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, and another the glory of the stars. For star differeth from star in glory.

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it shall rise in incorruption.

“It is sown in dishonour, it shall rise in glory. It is sown in weakness, it shall rise in power.

“It is sown a natural body, it shall rise a spiritual body. If there be a natural body, there is also a spiritual body, as it is written.” (1 Cor. xv. 41-44.)

The body will rise from the grave clad in perpetual youth, inaccessible to pain and suffering, free from defect, resplendent in the glory of

heaven. Not merely a natural body, endowed with perfect natural beauty, but a spiritual body, reflecting the beauty of divine grace. It will be penetrated and illumined by the spirit of God shining in the soul that is saved, just as the sun's light, passing through clear crystal, reveals its gorgeous colouring. All the fair and lovely things of earth pass away; all the magnificent productions of art dissolve into ugliness, in comparison with that scene which the apostle describes.

No poet, however rich his gift of language, however strong his imagination, will complete, in this world, the song begun by St. Paul. Looking deep into the luminous abyss of God's mysteries, he surpasses our comprehension even in the simple language with which he describes what he sees.

Yet even St. Paul could only speak as a man; he was forced to make known the things of God in the words of man.

The hour is approaching when we with our own eyes shall behold the glory which St. Paul so vividly extols.

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When the way is hard and long, when the strife is fierce and bitter, recall to our mental sight this vision of St. Paul; let us hear his song of triumph beating in our ears and pulsing in our hearts. One moment of sweet refreshment for our souls, and

then, shouldering again the burden, we shall gladly bear it to the end, knowing that the reward is certain.

“ BE LIGHT MADE ”

Hail holy light! offspring of heav'n first-born
 Or of th' Eternal co-eternal beam
 May I express thee unblamed? since God is light
 And never but in unapproachèd light
 Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee,
 Bright effluence of bright essence increate.
 Or hear'st thou rather pure ethereal stream,
 Whose fountain who shall tell? Before the sun,
 Before the heavens, thou wert, and at the voice
 Of God, as with a mantle, didst invest
 The rising world of waters dark and deep.

— MILTON, *Paradise Lost* (Bk. III. 1).

THE blind poet realized the blessing he had lost, for he himself tells us that he sings of the fall of man

“as the wakeful bird
 Sings darkling, and in the shadiest covert hid
 Tunes her nocturnal note.”

He longed for light, the first and choicest gift that issued from the Creator's hand.

When God desired to bestow order and beauty on a world that was still void and empty, He spoke, and for the first time the great Creator's

voice sounded in space, saying: "Be light made!" And light was made.

Hitherto all had been shrouded in darkness, but at that wondrous word the first ray of light, like a golden spear, flashed through the gloom . . . and then the mighty flood poured out, quivering and gleaming in triumphant splendour over the whole expanse. The angels, morning stars of creation, sang exultantly, praising their Maker and welcoming Light, the first-born of the visible world, revelation of the invisible, source of all beauty. All the other things that God made were the offspring of Light, and since the first creative word was uttered, the fountain of Life that it brought forth has never ceased to flow. Like the sea, with its tide ever rising and falling, light shines on the world, bestowing life and blessings, including all in its joyous embrace. It is lavished on all so plentifully, so richly that we who dwell in the light do not know the value of that which we possess.

"Be light made!" These words were heard a second time when the new creation of grace was effected. The human race was sunk in the darkness of ignorance and terror. And a Light flashed from heaven, and the Word, Truth itself, came down to enlighten us. The divine Light came as gently as the morning glow, gradually revealing its splendour, penetrating the hearts of men tenderly yet powerfully, opening the eyes of the blind, calling into existence a wonderful Life.

Darkness gave place to sunshine. Questioning and complaining died away; doubt and anxiety vanished. Men looked up with glad confidence when the Gospel, the good tidings of salvation, was made known to them. And this stream, too, has flowed in every age, reaching the nations that sat in darkness and the shadows. This divine Light finds its way to every heart, for it is intended to enlighten every man that cometh into this world. We, who have lived in it so long and experienced its blessed fruits, can scarcely comprehend what it has done for us.

“Be light made!” These words ring forth for the third time when the soul, that has found mercy, enters Eternity. Well may it seem to it that it is passing from the gloom of night to the brilliancy of day. How can we of earth describe this light eternal? Shall we call it Truth, or Sanctity, or Bliss? Shall we say that it is to behold God face to face, while our hearts are aflame with charity?

Or shall we simply say that it is God? Each name is correct . . . but only the last, the sacred, the awful, the holy name of God is able to describe it.

For God is light! He is the lamp of the heavenly Jerusalem, which has no need of the sun. In His light we shall see light. Strengthened by His might we shall stand before the Triune God, on fire with love.

Yet how vain is any attempt to utter with our

stammering tongue that which even the angels cannot express. In his immortal poem Dante speaks of these things in a way that commands our wonder, but even he complains that words are too poor to convey his thoughts, and that his mind is incapable of grasping the great reality. It is only in types that Holy Scripture reveals the splendour of heaven. "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man which things God hath prepared for them that love Him."

We cannot understand nor describe that which surpasses all human experience and comprehension. Therefore let us be silent and wait in humility for that great day when, with the other of the faithful, we may realize that "perpetual light" which shall shine on us for evermore and stand

"Ourselves transformed to Light. Inebriate
With joy when in the presence of our God."

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O Light of God, true Light that cometh into the world . . . shine upon us, warm our cold hearts with Thy eternal rays, that when the end approaches we may enter into Thy presence secure in the faith, knowing that we have "fought the good fight, and have kept the faith."

REST AND ACTIVITY

DURING their earthly Life it is the lot of few men to know perfect peace. Goaded by ambitions, anxieties, and often sorrow and suffering, enticed by allurements and prospects of happiness, the soul is so continually beset as to have small time for reflection. The very air is filled with the dust of labour. Man is urged on and on, and drives others on and on, until Life is exhausted and the end comes to still the weary heart for ever.

Few can escape this turmoil. The most remote hermitages, the most secluded religious houses are from time to time invaded by guests from without, and even if these could be excluded, from the very hearts of the inmates themselves would proceed thoughts to disturb their peace. For though we manage to escape others, no one can escape himself.

Our souls long for rest and peace as flowers in a drought must long for the dew of evening. The very sound of the word arouses a craving in our weary hearts, a sort of homesickness — for we have really a home that is the abode of peace, where we shall find rest to our souls. No sorrow or suffering can penetrate that stronghold. The stress of passion cannot assail it. The faintest cloud of Death cannot dim the brightness of its sky. Death will no longer exist. “God shall

wipe away all tears from their eyes, and Death shall be no more, nor moaning, nor crying, nor sorrow." (Apoc. xxi. 4.)

Eternal rest will encompass us. Peace will reign within and without us. No longer shall our souls seek for or crave anything, for they will possess the highest good, satisfying every desire. The powers of the mind and the affections of the heart will not be in conflict, but in harmony, the glorified body the adaptable instrument of the soul, her willing and worthy companion. No shadows will mar our joyful peace. All who are saved are, as it were, firmly anchored in God, surrounded and penetrated by His might, so that there is not the remotest thought of turning away from Him nor the least fear of change or loss. Everywhere is perfect and profound peace.

But this peace is not an inactive one, nor does the soul indolently abandon herself to dreams of passive enjoyment. Eternal rest is Eternal Life, and where there is Life there is strength and action. The faculties of mind and body, steeped in God's glorious light, grow and develop far beyond earthly limitations, and the soul rises exultantly to unimagined heights. The inner Life reveals its riches, hidden springs gush forth, the blossoms of man's intellect send up their fragrance to God, from whom all these things proceed. Every thought, every action is directed toward Him.

Neither is the glorified body idle. It has re-

covered the senses and faculties that served it so well on earth, perfected now in God's own day. What sights do the eyes of the blessed behold! What sounds fall on their listening ears! The speech of heaven is like the ripple of water or the sweetest music.

On earth many obstacles hinder our activity, and our work is often accompanied by exertion and distaste and pain. But all fetters shall be loosened here, and all our forces will have free play. Our activity will be a glorious arrival at a delightful goal.

On earth each man is a narrow circle, fenced about by insuperable barriers. He constantly runs opposite to the will of others. Circumstances hamper and distress him. But then God's infinite will lies open before him, and in God are all things — all the problems and mysteries of the universe, all the intricacy of Life, all realities, all possibilities. Never will the mind come to a standstill, saying: "I have reached the end." The farther it goes, the deeper its insight.

On earth man is often isolated, misunderstood, and thwarted in his most cherished designs, most sacred aspirations. Then helping hands will be outstretched on every side.

"For each will give, and each receive
And no one stand alone."

THE NOISE OF MANY WATERS, AND THE MUSIC OF THE HARPS

OUR Lord's favourite disciple was privileged to see far into the future destiny of the Church and into the glories of heaven. St. John had wonderful visions during his banishment on the Island of Patmos. We find them recorded in the Apocalypse, that document of encouragement, of admonition, and of consolation. In the silence of his lonely, rock-bound prison the apostle heard the eternal harmonies, the songs of the blessed.

"And I heard a voice from heaven, as the noise of many waters, and as the voice of great thunder; and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers, harping on their harps." (Apoc. xiv. 2.)

Like the noise of many waters thundering in their fall sounded the heavenly strains, yet at the same time there was the sweetness of harps. The one sound suggests power, force, and majesty; the other soft melody, delightful harmony. Both are united in the heavenly Jerusalem, so that many things here incompatible there show no antagonism.

We can see a further meaning in these words. The heavenly song expresses joy unspeakable — happiness; enthusiastic praise of God — activity. Both states involve community of action and per-

sonal effort, but we may compare common happiness and common activity with the noise of many waters, that owe all their significance to their sounding in unison. Yet our souls preserve their personality and are not absorbed in the volume of water. The soul is like a harper, evoking melody from golden strings.

Each great task accomplished on this earth is brought about either by the force of united action or by weight of personality. There is excitement indeed in having part in some great undertaking and helping to carry it through to success, but many an individual feels that he has had no opportunity to develop his own powers, obliged, rather, to act as a link in a chain, a wheel in a machine. A few indeed, endowed with special talents, go their own way — a small minority. Yet even this has its drawback. Whoever has received the fiery baptism of genius is compelled to walk apart. Companions who will understand or help are seldom to be found.

But in heaven the noise of many waters does not drown the sweet music of the harps. All can unite jointly without being impeded by another.

What has been said of activity is true also of happiness. Happiness naturally seeks companionship — but how it fades in the midst of a multitude! The deepest joy cannot be shared. It dwells within the heart like a breath or a fragrance, scarcely perceptible, inexpressible in words. When one's delight is most ecstatic, one would be

alone. The harp must be silent while the sound of many waters fills the ears.

It is otherwise in heaven. The fact that the joy of heaven is common to all does not disturb the quiet happiness of each individual heart, but increases it. Every single note forms part of the harmony and adds to the common joy. The bond is strong, but supple and elastic.

We shall never know the real meaning of the words peace and harmony until our barks rest upon the eternal shore. Here the sound of rushing waters thunders in our ears. Yet there are times when, after a hard fight, after conquering temptation, the Lord, knowing our weakness, invites us to enjoy peace. He leads us unto His altar and there into His presence. How small and trivial then the world seems, which had us in its strangling grip!

FOR EVER AND EVER

HOW poor, how bare were the gods of antiquity! How little could they offer to mankind!

The pagan Teutons regarded it as their highest happiness to be, after Death, admitted to Valhalla, the stronghold of the All-Father, whence they went forth in the morning to the joyous chase, returning at night to partake in spacious halls of

inexhaustible vessels of delicious mead. Only great heroes could hope for this happiness. There was no room for the poor or lowly in Valhalla. And, moreover, there was no permanence, for lurking in the background was the Twilight of the Gods, destined to swallow up Woden the supreme ruler, Thor the mighty, and Baldur the bright and beautiful.

The pleasure-loving Greeks had still less hope of future happiness. They believed that, after Death, they would pass to the nether-world and wander there as melancholy shades, over meadows where the pale asphodel blossomed, and mingling their sighs with the lamentations that rose without ceasing from the waters of Acheron. The laughing gods of Olympus, feasting at golden tables, had no thought of raising mortals to share their revels; rather, they were envious of all earthly happiness. Moreover, with Olympus it was as with the Twilight of the Gods — it was overshadowed by the threat of a fate that even the gods were powerless to avert. They had not always enjoyed supremacy, and one day the sceptre was to be wrested from their grasp.

The Egyptians believed in a trial after Death. With forty-two assistants, Osiris discharged the functions of his gloomy office, weighing the hearts of men in his impartial balance. The righteous might be deemed worthy to sail in the golden bark to the fields of Aalu. But even so, Life there was only a reflection, a mere echo, of Life in this

world. Those who could not afford the expense of embalming and of a sepulchre proof against destruction, had to renounce all hope of personal existence beyond the grave. As their bodies crumbled to dust, so did their souls vanish, like drops of water in the ocean.

In the East, where the human intellect, rallying all its forces, examined the problems of Life, after the boldest attempts at philosophical speculation the absolute negation of existence was regarded as the final end. Men looked forward to Nirvana, to the bottomless abyss of annihilation.

To us it is given to hear words unknown to the worshippers of the old Germanic gods — words never uttered on the sunny slopes of Hellas or in the vast temples of Egypt — the simple yet solemn words: *Per omnia saecula saeculorum*.

They contain a recognition of God, who liveth and reigneth FOR EVER AND EVER, and who would have us share His Eternal Life.

Daniel in his vision beheld Him enthroned on high, His hair snowy as wool, His face like a flaming fire — the Ancient of Days, the Ever-Young. He governs the whole world, being everywhere present, yet the world cannot contain Him, for He is exalted far above it. He is superior to all limitations of time and space. His Eternity is not merely an existence without beginning and without end. It knows neither yesterday nor tomorrow, but is a calm, unbroken present. There

is no time with God. Worlds move in their orbits at His feet and centuries pass while He surveys all, the Ruler of All. The Source of Life, in Him and through Him are all things. Without His consent naught can perish or be diverted a hair's breadth from its course. He liveth and reigneth for ever and ever. Hence in His sight a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years. Apart from Him is nothing, either great or small. Yet He does what the Olympic gods never dreamed of doing — He lifts us in His fatherly arms to His eternity.

None of the pagan philosophers ventured to imagine such a destiny, not even those who possessed some glimmering of the truth. But now, in every church, however humble, we hear the exultant words: *Per omnia saecula saeculorum*; and they will continue to ring out until the end of time . . . and in the world to come they will be chanted in full chorus, swelling to a torrent of joy that will be poured forth without ceasing,

“While time itself
And earth shall be no more.”

.

Relying upon Thy promises, O blessed Lord, we are looking forward to the end. For some of us it is swiftly approaching; for others it is still in the distant future.

The thoughts of some hearts are centred on Thee, knowing that ere long they shall see Thee.

Other hearts rarely think of Thee; earth is claiming them on every side, insistently.

Help us all, O Crucified Redeemer — those near Thee and far away. Make us one in hope, one in faith, one in charity.

FOR EVER AND EVER

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